

## The Idaho Food Stamp Program Facts

Idaho's communities are stronger when families have access to the safe, healthy food needed to meet basic needs and fuel active lives. With sufficient food every day, children perform better in school, parents can be more productive at work and families can fully participate in and feel part of their communities. It is for this reason that the public sector must work together with the faith community, non-profit organizations and private business to ensure that every family enjoys the security of having its basic nutritional needs met.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP), is one of the best lines of defense against hunger in the United States. In Idaho, this program is referred to as the Food Stamp program and is administered and funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the federal level and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) at the state level. The Food Stamp program helps working families, children, people with disabilities, seniors and many others in need put food on their tables.

### The Food Stamp Program as a *Supplemental* Nutrition Program

The Food Stamp program is a nutrition assistance program. The program is not designed, nor does it provide enough assistance, to be the only source of food and nutrition for recipients. In Idaho, in March 2011, the **average Food Stamp recipient received \$132 a month averaging out to \$1.42 per meal.** Food Stamps rarely meet a family's needs for an entire month. Families are often forced to seek additional assistance from the Idaho Foodbank and local food pantries during the month when their Food Stamps are exhausted. Benefits may be used to buy only food items for consumption in the home; alcohol, tobacco and non-food household items are excluded.

### Food Stamp Program Eligibility

To be eligible for Food Stamps an individual must meet eligibility requirements including, but not limited to citizenship, household income and assets and provide information and verification about their household circumstances at the time they apply. Once a person is determined eligible they are required to recertify and report changes in household circumstances to IDHW on a regular basis. IDHW accepts applications for Food Stamps at any office regardless of where a person resides.

Only US citizens and certain qualified legal immigrants can receive Food Stamps. Undocumented persons have never been eligible. There are stringent processes to determine citizenship and immigration status in the program which makes the likelihood of a person fraudulently qualifying for benefits unlikely. Legal immigrants can only get Food Stamps if they've lived in the U.S. for at least five years or have had earnings in the U.S. for a minimum of 10 full years; however exceptions to this rule are made for refugees, asylees and children.

**The Idaho Food bank's Hunger in Idaho 2010 study reported that nearly 40 percent of respondents indicated receiving income from a job.** Idaho's high unemployment rate coupled with many people being underemployed has contributed to the growing number of individuals qualifying for Food Stamps. Food Stamp recipients who

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are not employed are required to participate in Enhanced Work Services (EWS), including the Job Search Assistance Program, which assists individuals in gaining, sustaining, and expanding employment opportunities (some exceptions to this rule apply).

It is important to note that many Food Stamp recipients are children, elderly or disabled limiting their employment opportunities. In fact, of all Food Stamp households in the United States, 51 percent include children, 19 percent include seniors and 23 percent include someone with a disability. **All together, 83 percent of Food Stamp households have a child, a senior or a disabled person.** While there is not data specific to this for Idaho, it can be assumed that the percentages would be similar.

## The Economic Benefit of the Food Stamp Program

**Every \$5 in Food Stamp benefits generates \$9 in economic activity**, according to USDA. Food Stamps not only help low-income people buy groceries, it frees up cash for other expenses, such as medical care, clothing, home repairs and childcare. This benefits local businesses and their employees, which boosts the economy as a whole.

## Efficiency & Effectiveness of the Idaho Food Stamp Program

In spite of record participation growth, Idaho's Food Stamp program continues to perform at a high level. Idaho's payment error rate, a measurement of how accurately benefit amounts are determined by state staff, remains low at 3.32 percent for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2010. This ranked 18th best in the nation last fiscal year. In addition, from November 2009 through the end of June 2010, Food Stamp eligibility was determined within 2 business days of receiving an application over 98 percent of the time.

IDHW operates one of the leanest and most efficient Food Stamp programs in the country. In FFY 2010, Idaho ranked 48<sup>th</sup> out of 53 states and territories in terms of administrative costs at \$18.13 per case. Other state's administrative costs ranged from a low of \$9.82 per case to \$100.85 per case.

Waste, fraud and abuse represent a very small portion of the Food Stamp program. The Federal program acknowledges that it may account for as little as 1% nationally. There are no estimates available for Idaho however IDHW continues to work on ways to improve the integrity of the program by implementing effective program controls and by improving methods to identify, investigate, and stop misuses.

## Facts about Hunger in Idaho

The Idaho Foodbank's (IFB) *Hunger in Idaho 2010*, the largest hunger study ever done in the state, found that **17,200** people needed emergency food assistance on any given week, and **142,200** people per year received assistance. It also found that in Idaho:

- **47 percent** of food bank clients report having to choose between paying for food or paying for utilities or heating fuel.

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- **34 percent** of food bank clients had to choose between paying for food or paying their rent or mortgage.
- **34 percent** of food bank clients had to choose between paying for food or paying for medicine or medical care.
- Only **36 percent** of food bank client households receive Food Stamps.
- Among the programs that existed in 2006, **83 percent** of pantries, **60 percent** of kitchens and **64 percent** of shelters in Idaho saw an increase in the number of people who came to their emergency food program sites.
- Among households with children, **86 percent** of those served are food insecure and **38 percent** are food insecure with very low food security.

For more information about what hunger looks like in your community please visit the Idaho Foodbank's website at [www.idahofoodbank.org](http://www.idahofoodbank.org) and review the recently published "Map the Meal Gap". This study shows hunger at the county level, allowing everyone to recognize what it looks like in their own backyard.

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