USDA Nutrition Programs for Older Americans

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Key Programs Serving Seniors

- **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**
  - Provides low-income seniors with food package containing variety of foods that are good source of missing nutrients
  - Operates in 46 States, DC, and 2 Indian reservations
  - About 573,000 individuals participated each month in FY14

- **Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)**
  - Provides low-income seniors with coupons for eligible foods at farmers’ markets, roadside stands, and CSAs
  - Operates in 43 States, DC, and 7 Indian reservations
  - Served about 790,000 individuals in FY14
Other Programs Serving Seniors

- **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**
  - Reimburses centers that provide day services to seniors to help them serve nutritious meals
  - Operates in all States and DC
  - About 120,000 adults participated each day in FY14

- **Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)**
  - Provides USDA foods to low-income households, including seniors, living on Indian reservations, and to Native American families residing in designated areas near reservations and in Oklahoma
  - Operated by Tribes and States
  - Served about 85,000 individuals each month in FY14
Largest Program Serving Seniors

• **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
  ▫ First line of defense against hunger for low-income people – $70 billion program
  ▫ Mandatory entitlement – available to nearly anyone with little income and few resources
  ▫ Serves approximately 4.6 million seniors
    • 9.3 percent of participants are seniors
    • 7.5 percent of benefits go to seniors
    • 17.4 percent of SNAP households have a senior member
SNAP Participation Rate Among Seniors Is About Half of the Overall Participation Rate During Past 20 Years
Senior Participation Rates by State

FY 2012 Senior Participation Rate: 42 Percent

- WA, OR
- CA
- NV, ID
- MT
- NE, ND, SD, WI
- MN, IA, IL, MI, WI
- KY, FL
- VA, NC, SC, GA
- TN, AR, LA, OK
- TX, CO, WY, UT
- ID

Key:
- Less than 20 percent
- 20 to 30 percent
- 30 to 40 percent
- 40 to 50 percent
- 50 percent or more

a BBCE policy
b Standard medical deduction program
c SSI-CAP
Who Are the Seniors Participating in SNAP?

- 73% live alone
- 64% are female
- Average gross income is 86% of the poverty line, or $883 per month, compared to 59% for all SNAP households
- Average monthly benefit is $106 per person, compared to $131 for all SNAP participants
- 6.8% have earned income
- 70% receive Social Security
- 36% receive Supplemental Security Income

Source: SNAP Quality Control Data, FY 2013
What about the 60% of eligible seniors that are not participating in SNAP?

- Mostly similar to seniors that receive SNAP but there are some differences...
  - Are eligible for a lower benefit
    - About 70 percent qualify for a benefit that is less than half the maximum allotment, compared to 37 percent of households with no senior members
  - At lower benefit levels, senior participation rate is close to overall participation rate
  - At higher benefit levels, disparity is much greater

Source: 2005 Panel of Survey of Income and Program Participation
Why are they not participating?

• Research on the reasons for nonparticipation by eligible seniors suggests multiple causes. Compared to other eligible non-participants, seniors are:
  ▫ Less likely to know whether they are eligible or the amount of benefit for which they qualify
  ▫ Less likely to know where to apply for benefits
  ▫ Report less interest in the program, regardless of perceived eligibility

• Reasons cited for nonparticipation include: desire for personal independence, the perceived cost of applying and participating, the low benefit expected, and the stigma associated with program participation
Elderly Nutrition Pilots: 2002-2004

- Pilots in 6 States tested three approaches to increase SNAP participation among seniors:
  - Simpler eligibility determination rules (FL): participation increased by more than 20%; lowest cost pilot
  - One-on-one application assistance (ME, MI, AZ): in most successful site, participation increased by more than 30%; more costly to operate
  - Commodity alternative (CT, NC): in one site, participation increased by more than 35%; very costly and difficulty to implement
Pilots in 3 States tested approaches to facilitate SNAP access for seniors:

- Michigan and Pennsylvania: provided application assistance and simplified application waiving income verification requirements; interview could be conducted by demo staff to conduct interviews
- Ohio: provided only application assistance

Michigan and Pennsylvania pilots had statistically significant impact on senior participation

Effects strongest for the oldest senior households, suggests eliminating SNAP office visit may have played an important role
Increasing Participation Among Medicare’s Low-Income Population: 2010 Pilots

- Pilots in 3 States tested approaches to facilitate SNAP access for recipients of Medicare’s Extra Help or Medicare Savings Programs:
  - New Mexico: combined application, deemed income, standardized benefits
  - Pennsylvania: shortened application, application assistance, deemed income
  - Washington: shortened application, targeted outreach

- All 3 pilots had positive effects but were very small
- Some eligible seniors still chose not to participate; had better levels of food security
Other Efforts to Encourage Participation

• Combined Application Projects (CAPs): Allows elderly and disabled SSI recipients to receive SNAP by using automation, simplified or standardized benefits, and eliminating need for office visit (18 States)

• Standard Medical Deductions: Allows households with elderly or disabled members to receive a standard medical deduction from gross income if medical expenses exceed $35 a month (18 States)

• Elderly Simplified Application Project: Allows simplified application, use of data matching, and 36-month certification period for households with only elderly or disabled members (7 States)
Current Initiatives

• 2014 Farm Bill now allows home delivery services to accept SNAP benefits for senior and disabled participants
  ▫ Proposed rule to implement this provision published in July
  ▫ Plan to issue “Request for Volunteers” seeking meal delivery services that are interested in accepting SNAP benefits in early 2016

• In FY16 budget request, FNS asked to expand Elderly Simplified Application Projects
  ▫ Would reduce requirements for States to implement
Conclusions

• Some policies/options seem to increase senior participation in SNAP
  ▫ One-on-one application assistance
  ▫ Simplified application with reduced verification requirements
  ▫ Waiving face-to-face interview in SNAP office

• Yet barriers remain
  ▫ Some eligible seniors may never choose to participate
  ▫ Unlikely that FNS can close the participation rate gap so will continue to rely on a range of programs to serve seniors