



# Nutrition for Family Living

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## January, 2001 Topics

Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit  
Welfare Reform's Impact on Enrollment in Selected Assistance Programs  
Dietary Quality and Related Factors Among Participants in Food Stamps and WIC Programs

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## Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit

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From the desk of Sherry T.:

A valuable resource for Food Security Assessment is currently being developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). "Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit" authored by Barbara Cohen, Linda Kantor and Margaret Andrews in partnership with the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) will soon be available through the USDA. The purpose of the document is to provide a standardized set of measurement tools for assessing various indicators of community food security. The toolkit is a key component of USDA's Community Food Security Initiative to improve our knowledge about the nature and magnitude of hunger and food insecurity in the United States.

While the document states that Community Food Security is a relatively new concept with no universally accepted definition, it continues by offering the following:

Community food security is most easily understood as a hierarchy or continuum in which the end goal is a "food secure" community in which "all people in a community have access to a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through non-emergency (or conventional) food sources at all times."

Communities may be considered to be food insecure if:

- there are inadequate resources from which people can purchase foods.
- the available food purchasing resources are not accessible to all community members.
- the food available through the resources is not sufficient in quantity or variety.
- the food available is not competitively priced and thus is unaffordable to most households.
- there are inadequate food assistance resources to help low-income people purchase foods at retail markets.
- there are no local food production resources.
- locally produced food is not available to community members.
- there is no support for local food production resources.
- there is a high level of household food insecurity within the community.



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Some examples of programs that were implemented federally to address community food security include the Food Stamp Outreach program, farmer's markets, community gardens, asset development programs, food buying cooperatives, community supported agriculture programs, Farm-to-School initiatives and community kitchens.

When implemented with a strong Federal nutrition safety net and other emergency food assistance programs that work to alleviate hunger and food insecurity over the short-term, community food security initiatives may increase economic resources available to households; strengthen local capacity for food production, processing and marketing; and boost the effectiveness of Federal food assistance and education programs.

This toolkit resource is quite comprehensive in its approach to Food Security Assessment. The following five basic components of data collection are described in detail:

- Assessment of community characteristics
- Inventory of community food resources
- Assessment of food accessibility
- Assessment of food availability and affordability
- Assessment of community food production

In many of our counties, we are working with people and local coalitions to help alleviate food insecurity at the individual, family and community level. When a household is facing food insecurity, chances are high that the other issues addressed by the core areas of our extension programming are also in jeopardy: dietary quality, food safety and resource management. Building relationships with our low-income audiences and with other partners interested in hunger related issues will help our communities to become more food secure. This comprehensive resource will soon be available from USDA. It will be a valuable tool for community-based teams as they take action to identify and address needs in their communities. We will send an email message to the UWEX FLP list when we get ordering information.



## **Welfare Reform's Impact on Enrollment in Selected Assistance Programs**

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As welfare reform occurred in the mid-1990's, concern was raised that there would be unintended consequences for children. In a study in December's *Pediatrics*, child advocates in Wisconsin observed trends in enrollment in Medicaid/AFDC, Medicaid/Healthy Start, Food Stamps, and WIC from January 1995 – August 1998, while changes in welfare reform were occurring.

The authors looked at enrollment during three periods: pre-welfare reform (January – December, 1995), the welfare reform pilot period (January 1996 – August 1997), and Wisconsin Works (September 1997 – August 1998). They monitored children from birth to 18 years enrolled in W-2 and/or AFDC, Food Stamps, Medicaid/Healthy Start, Medicaid/AFDC, and WIC. These programs were chosen for analysis because AFDC, Food Stamps, and Medicaid were originally linked in their certification process, so if an individual was eligible for AFDC they were also eligible for Food Stamps and Medicaid or Healthy Start. WIC is targeted to similar income families but maintains a separate enrollment and certification process. After welfare reform was enacted, certification processes for W-2, Medicaid/Healthy Start, and Food Stamps were separated and eligibility criteria were changed, making it more complicated for eligible families to access assistance.

There was a 75% reduction in infants and children enrolled in AFDC from January 1995 to August 1998. During that period, there was a 41% decrease in enrollment in Food Stamps in the same population. Medicaid/Healthy Start enrollment declined by 47%; however, due to aggressive efforts to enroll uninsured children after Medicaid and TANF were delinked in 1997, Medicaid/Healthy Start enrollments increased after that. There was only a small, non-significant reduction in WIC enrollment during that time.

The authors point out that WIC enrollment may have remained stable because traditionally WIC has been separate from cash assistance programs. They note that aggressive recruitment efforts, targeting children who previously received Medicaid/AFDC and were no longer enrolled in either program, were successful in getting uninsured children enrolled in Medicaid/Healthy Start after welfare reform was enacted. Badgercare, Wisconsin's children health insurance program implemented in July 1999, has continued to identify and enroll low income children, some of whom come from families who would have met AFDC criteria. (Keep in mind that many BadgerCare families would not have met AFDC criteria, so including those BadgerCare children in counts showing how BadgerCare ameliorated effects of welfare reform is potentially confusing. In addition, efforts to recruit Food Stamp participants were not as uniformly aggressive during the time of this study.)

Extension educators who work with low-income families are in a position to observe the unintended consequences of public policy changes. Extension can make participants aware of safety-net programs such as Food Stamps and WIC, as well as child nutrition programs such as school breakfast and school lunch.

Willis E, Malloy M, Kliegman RM. Welfare Reform Consequences for Children: The Wisconsin Experience. *Pediatrics* 2000;106(6). [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/106/6/e83](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/106/6/e83)



## **Dietary Quality and Related Factors Among Participants in Food Stamp and WIC Programs**

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Three recent reports describe findings based on recent Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII) data and/or the Diet and Health Knowledge Survey (DHKS). These studies were conducted to investigate the relationship between participation in large food/nutrition assistance programs (Food Stamps and WIC) and dietary knowledge, attitudes and behavior in low-income individuals. We'll begin this summary with information from the most recent report on "dietary intake and dietary attitudes among food stamp participants and other low-income individuals" from USDA.

### **Dietary Knowledge and Attitudes Among Low-Income Adults**

- Large numbers of low-income adults do not know specific facts about the health consequences of their dietary habits, such as what health problems may result from eating particular foods.
- Many low-income adults do not know specific facts about healthy eating, such as the specific types of foods to eat to have a healthy diet.
- Food Stamp Program (FSP) participants and non-participants have similar levels of dietary knowledge.
- Both low- and high-income adults consider healthy eating to be important.
- Many low-income adults are not confident that they eat a healthy diet. They believe that their diets are either too low or too high in one or more key nutrients. Food Stamp participants are more likely than non-participants to believe their diets are too low in a key vitamin or too high in a key macronutrient (like sugar or fat).

### **What Low-Income Americans Eat**

- Many low-income adults do not practice behaviors to lower the fat in their diets, such as eating vegetables without butter or drinking skim milk.
- Low-income individuals eat less than the recommended number of servings from all five of the major Food Guide Pyramid groups. Many individuals consume large amounts of foods from the Pyramid tip.
- Overall, low-income individuals do not meet the Dietary Guidelines for consuming dietary fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, fiber and sodium.
- High-income individuals are more likely than low-income individuals to meet many of the Dietary Guidelines. For example, more high-income preschoolers than low-income preschoolers meet the fat and saturated fat guidelines. High-income adults are more likely than low-income adults to meet the guidelines for fiber, cholesterol and sodium.

### **How Food Stamp Program Participation Affects Dietary Intake**

- Regardless of people's knowledge and attitudes, food stamp participation is not significantly related to low-income individuals' intake of food energy, vitamins and minerals, macronutrients or food groups. In other words, participants and non-participants have similar dietary intakes.
- Food Stamp participants and non-participants consume similar amounts of vitamins and minerals, on average.
- Food Stamp participants obtain more of their food from food stores than non-participants.



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### Food Stamps and WIC

Diet quality of WIC participants as well as Food Stamp recipients was the focus of another report released this past year. Using data from the CSFII for 1994-96, researchers at USDA/ERS measured seven categories of food intake using serving definitions from the Food Guide Pyramid. They reported that participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) appears to increase intakes of meats, added sugars, and total fats but not fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy products. These associations seem to show that FSP participants have more money for food and improved overall food security without improvements in the overall quality of their food choices.

In this same USDA/ERS study, participation in WIC tended to reduce consumption of foods with added sugars, perhaps reflecting the substitution of WIC-supplied cereals and fruit juices for high-sugar cereals and soft drinks. WIC participants also tended to consume more fruits and dairy products than they might have otherwise done, but this finding was not statistically significant.

### WIC

Susan Partington and Susan Nitzke from UW-Madison examined food guide pyramid servings as indicators of diet quality among WIC and non-WIC participants. They used dietary recall data from a sample of Wisconsin WIC children ages 2-5 and comparable data from WIC and non-WIC children in the 1994 CSFII database. They found that WIC children consumed more of some dairy products and vegetables and less added sugar than children not participating in WIC.

### Implications for Extension

Food choices of families and individuals are influenced by a complex array of factors. These studies attempted to look at how resources (such as food stamps and WIC benefits) relate to the quality of diets for low-income families/children. Because the WIC program has more targeted food benefits along with a strong mandatory nutrition education component, it is not surprising that WIC's beneficial effects on dietary quality appear to be greater (or more easily detected in dietary recall data) than the FSP's effects on dietary quality.

An important finding of the first study was that lower income individuals were less knowledgeable about nutrition than higher income persons. This adds validity to the important roles we play in teaching about nutrition and healthful food choices to food stamp-eligible families and individuals, in addition to our broader programs for families, consumers and professional colleagues.

Gleason P, Rangarajan A, Olson C. Dietary Intake and Dietary Attitudes Among Food Stamp Participants and Other Low-income Individuals. USDA, September 2000.

Wilde PE, McNamara PE, Ranney CK. The effect on dietary quality of participation in the Food Stamp and WIC Programs. USDA Economic Research Service Food and Rural Economics Division Research Report Number 9. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/foodasst>.

Partington S, Nitzke S. Intake of food guide pyramid servings: A comparison of WIC children in Wisconsin and children from 1994 CSFII. *Journal of Nutrition Education* 31:38-42, 2000.

More information is available in Nutrition for Family Living articles from October, 2000 (Wisconsin Food Stamp Program Evaluation Summary), January, 2000 (Food Stamp Participants' Food Security and Nutrient Availability) and October, 1999 (Review of the Nutritional Status of WIC Participants).