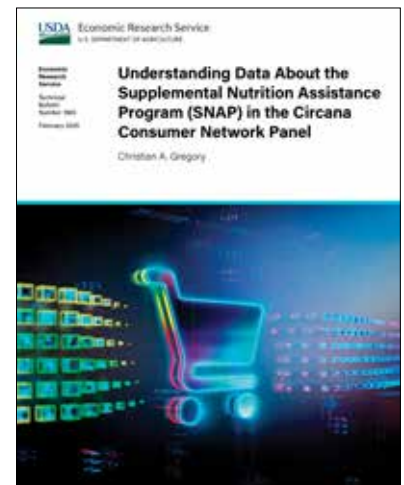


Understanding Data About the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the Circana Consumer Network Panel

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What Is the Issue?

The Circana (formerly, IRI) Consumer Network panel is a proprietary dataset that can be used to understand food prices, food demand, the food environment, consumer shopping behavior, and the relationships among them. This dataset is particularly relevant for food, nutrition, and health research. Circana's advantages over other sources of data on food purchases and health include its unevenly spaced panel data, detail of purchase information, short data production schedule, and the duration of collection. One notable feature is the inclusion of two indicators of household SNAP participation: one captures point-in-time participation; the other captures utilization. This report examines the quality of those indicators for the years 2018–20 and assesses the prospects of using the indicators in diet, health, and nutrition research.

What Did the Study Find?

- Almost half of respondent households in the static panel do not indicate whether they participated in SNAP in June.
- The SNAP participation indicator collected in June and the SNAP utilization indicator collected continuously throughout the year sometimes do not agree with each other.
- When benchmarking monthly SNAP utilization in Circana against Federal surveys and administrative totals, this report finds that Circana substantially underreports the number of SNAP participants during the year; additionally, the annual profile of month-by-month SNAP usage constructed by using the utilization indicator also indicates substantial underreports.
- However, using the utilization measure of SNAP as a proxy for annual participation leads to estimates of participation that are comparable to Federal surveys.
- Using the utilization measure of SNAP participation leads to estimates of monthly participation that are between 25 and 40 percent below those of administrative totals.

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- The Circana SNAP sample has higher incomes than the SNAP population, as represented by the SNAP characteristics report based on quality control data.
- Comparisons of SNAP and non-SNAP households in Circana (even unconditional on income)¹ show little difference in levels of food spending.
- Monthly patterns of spending for SNAP households in Circana show decreased levels of spending at the end of the SNAP month, which is consistent with studies using other data sources.
- Circana consumer network panel data, compared to that in the Consumer Expenditure Survey, underestimate monthly food-at-home expenditures for SNAP participants by more than 30 percent.

How Was the Study Conducted?

This study uses the 2018–20 Circana Consumer Network panel data to tabulate summary measures of participation in and utilization of SNAP. The report compares the declared monthly utilization of SNAP with administrative totals available from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (Census Bureau) and the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Additionally, the report examines differences in SNAP yearly participation with that recorded in the Federal surveys—particularly the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, and the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey—as well as administrative microdata. The report examines the agreement between two indicators of SNAP participation in the data, SNAP participation rates by year and by month, demographic characteristics of SNAP participant households compared to administrative data, measures of monthly food-at-home expenditure in SNAP and non-SNAP households and expenditure patterns among SNAP households across the benefit month.

¹ This report focuses primarily on measurement errors in the SNAP indicators, rather than the sampling error that is indicated by the descriptions of shopping behavior and demographics.