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Feasibility and Accuracy of Record Linkage To Estimate Multiple Program Participation

Volume I, Record Linkage Issues and Results of the Survey of Food Assistance Information Systems

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Abstract

Administrative data from USDA's food assistance and nutrition programs (FANPs) provide statistics on the number and characteristics of program participants. However, policymakers and researchers often want more information than these administrative data provide about participation in multiple programs or the characteristics of families who choose to participate in some, but not all, programs for which they are eligible. This study investigates the feasibility of linking administrative data across FANPs to provide statistics on multiple-program participation. This report presents the results of the first phase of the study. The results are based on the Survey of Food Assistance Information Systems, taken in 26 States from directors of the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Child Nutrition Programs. The survey collected information about the characteristics and content of FANP information systems. Findings indicate that FSP and WIC statewide information systems vary significantly in the number and types of client identifiers, extent of data verification, and rules for data retention and overwriting. The survey also found that participant data from the child nutrition programs are currently unavailable at the State-level except from a handful of States.

To review the survey instruments, see *Feasibility and Accuracy of Record Linkage To Estimate Multiple Program Participation: Volume II, Survey of Food Assistance Information Systems—Survey Instruments*, E-FAN-03-008-2.

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