Chapter Four

Record Linkage Activities and Research Uses of FSP and WIC Data

The FSP's use of computer matching methods is widely recognized as an effective and efficient means of detecting dual participation and verifying income eligibility for program applicants. FSP computer matching activities are required by law and documented elsewhere (USDA/FNS, 2002). This chapter presents information about other types of record linkage activities used by FSP and WIC agencies, and discusses research uses of FSP and WIC data.

The Survey of Food Assistance Information Systems asked WIC administrators about record linkage activities used to detect dual participation or verify adjunctive income eligibility; FSP administrators were asked about record linkage methods used to establish direct certification for the NSLP. In addition, both FSP and WIC were asked about research uses of administrative data from their participant databases, and about their program's participation in State master indexes of social service clients.

Record Linkage Activities

Possible uses of computer matching in the WIC program include verification of adjunctive incomeeligibility, detection of dual participation with neighboring States, and detection of dual participation with the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). As reported in Chapter Three, none of the WIC agencies included in the survey reported use of batch computer matching methods to verify adjunctive income eligibility. Two States (California and Florida) report use of a real-time computer link to verify FSP and TANF adjunctive income eligibility, and six States (Alabama, California, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee) report use of a real-time computer link to verify Medicaid adjunctive income eligibility.

Record linkage activities to detect dual participation were reported by 14 of the 26 WIC agencies surveyed. Efforts to detect dual participation are more commonly done within State rather than across States (figure 8). Twelve WIC agencies report computer matching to detect dual participation between WIC and CSFP within State. Only four WIC agencies (Arizona, Colorado, Maine, and Oklahoma) report computer matching with other State WIC agencies to detect dual participation in WIC. ⁴¹ The four States that match records with other WIC programs were not asked to identify the neighboring States, but all four States have Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) operating WIC programs within their borders and Maine and Oklahoma volunteered that they match records with the ITO agencies. ⁴²

FSP computer matching methods to detect dual participation and verify income eligibility are not examined in this report because they are described thoroughly elsewhere (see USDA/FNS, 2002). We

⁴¹ Two of these four programs also match records to detect dual participation in WIC and CSFP.

⁴² Arizona reported matching records with 2 other WIC programs; Colorado matches records with one other program; Maine matches records with New Hampshire and two ITOs; Oklahoma matches records with eight ITO WIC programs operating in Oklahoma.

did, however, ask FSP administrators about use of record linkage methods to establish direct certification for the NSLP.

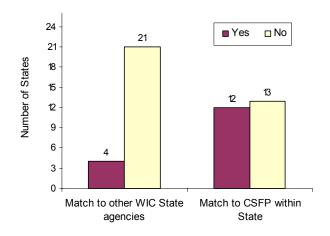


Figure 8—WIC program record linkage to detect dual participation

Direct certification for free school meals was authorized by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989 (PL 101-147). Direct certification enables school food authorities (SFAs) to certify children eligible for free school meals "without further application, by directly communicating with the appropriate State or local agency to obtain documentation that the children are members of either a household receiving food stamps or an assistance unit receiving AFDC." SFAs work with FSP agencies to determine methods of establishing direct certification. Five methods may be used and FSP agencies may use multiple methods to respond to the needs of SFAs within their State. The five allowed methods are:

- FSP sends letters to participating households, which are submitted to schools
- FSP sends data files to State Department of Education for computer matching
- FSP receives data from school districts and matches student records to the FSP database
- FSP receives data from the State DOE and matches student records to FSP database
- FSP sends data files to school districts for computer matching

Among the 26 States surveyed, the two most common means of establishing direct certification are the letter method (10 States), which does not involve record linkage, and the delivery of FSP data to State Departments of Education for use in computer matching (13 States). Only 4 FSP agencies reported that they did computer matching to establish direct certification (3 agencies receive data from the State DOE and one FSP agency receives data from school districts).⁴⁴ Two FSP agencies

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⁴³ Federal Register, Vol. 64, No. 248, page 72466.

The survey of CNP directors, conducted for this study, revealed consistent results, except that much of the data that FSP agencies deliver to State Departments of Education appears to be passed on to school districts. CNP directors reported that the letter method is used in 9 States, FSP agencies do computer matching in 4 States, State DOEs do the matching in 9 States, and school districts do the matching in 12 States.

reported that they send data files to school districts. And two FSP agencies indicated that they participate in none of the five methods for establishing direct certification for the NSLP. 45

Computer matching to establish direct certification relies on varying types and amounts of information (name, address, date of birth, SSN) across States, though it almost always utilizes unique Social Security Numbers to make the match between FSP participant records and school records. Among the 4 FSP agencies that perform computer matching for direct certification, only one did not report use of the SSN in the matching process. And among the seven State Departments of Education that perform computer matching for direct certification (as reported by CNP directors), only one did not report use of the SSN in the matching process.

Research Uses of Administrative Data

For this project, record linkage has been discussed within the context of "research uses of administrative data." To gauge the prevalence of research using FSP and WIC administrative data, we asked survey respondents about specific research uses of participant databases by their own agency and external organizations. Survey respondents were also asked about research partnerships maintained with organizations outside of FSP and WIC agencies.

Table 9 shows that FSP participant data are more likely to be used for research than WIC participant data. A larger number of FSP agencies reported use of their data for the research questions we posed—17 of 26 State FSP agencies versus 13 of 26 WIC agencies. This difference reflects a greater amount of research conducted internally by FSP agencies, compared to WIC agencies (12 FSP agencies versus 7 WIC agencies). But FSP and WIC agencies were equally likely to report use of their participant data for research conducted by outside organizations; half of the surveyed FSP and WIC agencies reported that their participant data was used for research by outside organizations such as other State agencies, universities, or research organizations.

Research by outside organizations is often facilitated through partnership agreements, especially when research is ongoing over a period of time. FSP and WIC agencies were asked: "Does your agency maintain relationships, such as research partnerships, with universities or other organizations who conduct research using the program's administrative data?" Ten FSP agencies and 13 WIC agencies reported research relationships with outside organizations (table 9). Universities are the most common partner in these relationships. The partner organizations identified by FSP and WIC agencies are listed in table 10.

Master Client Indexes

Several State FSP and WIC agencies participate in State-level master client indexes of social service clients. Master client indexes are created by record linkage and provide States with an unduplicated list of clients across several social service programs. This study found that 11 of 26 States had master client indexes in 2002; in 1997, only 5 of 26 States had master client indexes that linked data from multiple public assistance programs (UC Data, 1998). Master client indexes are typically stand-alone databases that receive data from multiple public assistance programs and link client records to produce a master list of clients with indicators of participation in each program.

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In the two States where FSP directors reported no methods of direct certification, CN directors reported that direct certification is established by computer matching performed by school districts.

As part of this study, both FSP and WIC administrators were asked if they had knowledge of a master file or index of clients from multiple public assistance programs maintained by any agency in their State. Taken together, the responses from FSP and WIC administrators identified 14 master client indexes in 11 States. FSP administrators were more likely to know of the existence of these databases, compared to WIC administrators. This reflects the fact that information from the FSP is included in

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Table 9—Research uses of FSP and WIC administrative data

	Food Stamp Program ¹		WIC Pro	WIC Program	
	Number States	Percent	Number States	Percent	
Reported uses of administrative data					
To examine: ²					
Duration of participation	14	54%	10	38%	
Rates of recertification	12	46	5	19	
Rates of enrollment by program clients					
in other public assistance programs	12	46	9	35	
Employment patterns of clients after					
they leave the program	4	15	na	na	
Rates of enrollment by multiple					
members of the same family	na	na	1	4	
Any of the above	17	65	13	50	
None of the above	9	35	13	50	
Types of organizations using administrative data for research ²					
Responding agency	12	71	7	50	
Any outside organization	12	71	12	92	
Types of outside organizations ²					
Other state agency	4	24	6	43	
University	8	47	6	43	
Research organization	8	47	4	29	
Other	1	6	3	21	
Does agency maintain research					
partnerships?					
Yes	10	38	13	50	
No	16	62	13	50	
Type of organization in research					
partnership					
Other state agency	2	20	2	15	
University	10	100	10	77	
Research organization	6	60	3	23	
Other	-	-	2	15	

⁻ Zero States in category.

Source: Survey of Food Assistance Information Systems, 2002.

Survey was completed by program administrators in 26 States: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington.

master indexes in all 11 states—some "indexes" are the FSP/TANF/Medicaid system with integration of additional programs; the WIC program is included in master client indexes in only 3 states.

The list of master client indexes is shown in table 11. Systems that were identified as "master indexes" but contain only FSP/TANF/Medicaid are not included in the list. Master client indexes are often maintained by the same State agency that runs the FSP data system. These 14 master client indexes contain information from an average of more than 7 public assistance programs. The most commonly represented programs are: FSP (11 States), TANF (11 States), Medicaid (10 States), Foster care (9 States), and Refugee assistance (8 States).

na Not applicable.

¹ The FSP information system in California is not fully integrated at the State level. Table includes data from the California Interim Statewide Automated Welfare System (ISAWS), operating in 35 California counties.

² Survey respondents checked all applicable items.

Table 10—Research partnerships with FSP and WIC agencies

	Type of organization	Name of organization	
Food Stamp Progam			
California (LEADER)	State agency Research org.	LA County Chief Administrator Office RAND	
Colorado	University Research org.	Colorado State University, University of Colorado Berkeley Planning Associate (BPA)	
Illinois	University	University of Chicago - Chapin Hall Center for Children	
lowa	University Research org.	Iowa State University Mathematica Policy Research Inc.	
Kentucky	State agency University Research org.	Department of Education University of Louisville Task Force on Hunger, Family Resources and Youth Services Centers and other Community Action agencies	
Maine	Research org.	Mathematica Policy Research Inc., Robert Wood Johnson	
Michigan	University Research org.	Univ. of Michigan Poverty Research and Training Center Abt Associates Inc., MDRC	
North Carolina	University	Jordan Institute for Families	
Oklahoma	University	University of Oklahoma	
Tennessee	University	Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee	
Texas	University Research org.	University of Texas, Texas A&M University Legislative Council	
VIC Program			
Arizona	State agency	ADHS Tobacco Education & Prevention Program	
California	University	University of California at Berkeley	
Florida	State agency University	Florida Agency for Health Care Administration University of Florida Maternal Child Health and Evaluation and Data Center	
Georgia	State agency	Epidemiology	
Illinois	University Research org.	University of Illinois, University of Chicago Chapin Hall Health Systems Research	
lowa	University	Iowa State University	
Kentucky	University	Children's Hospital Medical Center	
Massachusetts	University Research org.	Cornell University Prospect Associates, Market Street Research	
Michigan	University	Emory University, Michigan State University	
New Jersey	Federal agency	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)	
New York	University	SUNY at Albany School of Public Health	
North Carolina	State agency University	North Carolina Center for Health Statistics UNC Chapel Hill School of Public Health	
Virginia	University	University of VA, VA Commonwealth University	

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Table 11—State master indexes of public assistance program clients

	Name of index	Agency	Programs represented in index
Arizona	High level Client Index	Department of Economic Security	Child Support Enforcement; Child Protective Services; Child Welfare; Foster care; JOBS; Medicaid eligibility; Medicare; TANF; Food Stamps
California	Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS)	California Dept. of Health Services California Dept. of Health Services	Foster care; Medicaid eligibility; Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps CHIP; Medicaid eligibility; Other
	Statewide Client Index (SCI)	Health and Human Services Data	
	Welfare Data Tracking Implementation Project (WDTIP or TRAC)	Center Center	Child Protective Services; Child Welfare; Foster care; Refugee assistance; TANF; WIC; Food Stamps; Other
Colorado	Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS)	Colorado Dept. of Human Services	Child Support Enforcement; Child Welfare; Foster care; JOBS; LIHEAP; Medicaid eligibility; Medicare; Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps
Florida	Florida On-Line Recipient Data Access (FLORIDA) System	Department of Children and Families	Child Support Enforcement; Foster care; LIHEAP; Medicaid eligibility; Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps
Illinois	Client Database (CDB)	Illinois Department of Human	Foster care; Medicaid eligibility;
	Cornerstone	Services Illinois Department of Human Services	TANF; Food Stamps Child Protective Services; Commodity Supplemental Food Program; Medicaid eligibility; WIC; Other
Massachusetts	MassCARES	Executive Office of Health and Human Services	Child Abuse System; CHIP; Foster care; Head Start; Medicaid eligibility; Medicare; Refugee assistance; TANF; WIC; Food Stamps; Other
Michigan	Client Information System (CIS)	Family Independence Agency	Child Protective Services; Child Welfare; Foster care; Medicaid eligibility; Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps
Minnesota	Person Master Index (PMI)	Department of Human Services	CHIP; Medicaid eligibility; Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps; Other
Nebraska	Nebraska Family Online Client User System (N-Focus)	Nebraska Health and Human Services System	Child Abuse System; Child Protective Services; Child Welfare; CHIP; Employment Security Commission wage records; Foster care; JOBS; LIHEAP; Medicaid eligibility;Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps
New Jersey	Alpha-X	Office of Information Technology	Child Support Enforcement; Child Protective Services; TANF; Food Stamps
New York	Welfare Management System (WMS)	Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance	Child Welfare; LIHEAP; Medicaid eligibility; Medicare; Refugee assistance; TANF; Food Stamps

Source: Survey of Food Assistance Information Systems, 2002. Survey was completed by program administrators in 26 States.