

APPENDIX A

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The primary source of information for this study is in-depth case studies that examined the experiences of four states that have implemented the simplified reporting option (Arizona, Louisiana, Missouri, and Ohio) and one state (Arizona) that has implemented TBA as well. Most of the data collection occurred through site visit interviews conducted with state and local office staff in the four states.

1. Study State Selection Process

To identify potential study states, we first compiled information on the simplified reporting policies of states that had implemented simplified reporting as of January 2003 and, then in consultation with ERS, evaluated the states according to selection criteria to guide the selection process. We sought to achieve a mix of state design choices and other criteria. We considered the following:

- ***Simplified Reporting Implementation Date.*** Select states that implemented simplified reporting for earners under the pre-Farm Bill regulations (before October 2002) as well as states that implemented simplified reporting under the Farm Bill.
- ***Implementation of TBA.*** Select at least one state that has also implemented TBA.
- ***Simplified Reporting Certification Period.*** Select states with both 6- and 12-month certification periods to capture differences between the two systems and to understand how states with 12-month certification periods handle semiannual reports.
- ***Simplified Reporting Change Requirements.*** Select states that respond to all changes within the six-month period (by waiver) as well as states that respond to positive changes only (by regulation).

- **Population Covered by Simplified Reporting.** Select at least one state that covers households with and without earnings.
- **Alignment of Simplified Reporting Change Requirements with Other Programs.** Select at least one state that aligns its food stamp change reporting requirements with reporting requirements in other programs.
- **Error Rate.** Select states with a range of QC error rates.
- **Region.** Select states from a variety of USDA regions across the country.
- **State Size.** Select at least one large state (one in the top 10 of caseload sizes).

After selecting the four study states (Arizona, Louisiana, Missouri, and Ohio), we worked with state officials in each state to identify one local office to be visited. The four study states and local offices represent a broad range of approaches to simplified reporting and have established a fairly “typical” set of food stamp policies, thereby ensuring that the study’s findings will be informative and applicable to other states. Table A-1 shows how the simplified reporting policies of the four selected study states correspond to the selection criteria.

2. Case Studies in Four States

Most of the information gathered for the study was obtained through intensive site visits to each of the four study states between April and August 2003. A team of two researchers conducted each visit at both the state and local office level over a three-day period. During the site visits, we conducted individual interviews, held small-group discussions, observed food stamp service delivery, and (at two sites) conducted focus groups with food stamp participants. We also spoke to local advocacy groups or community-based organizations in each state to learn about their role in simplified reporting implementation. Before the visits, we developed prototype interview protocols, which we then adapted as needed to address variations in state policies and operations.

State Office Interviews. The state office interviews focused on reviewing state simplified reporting (and TBA) policies and goals, discussing design issues and philosophy, and examining general implementation issues, successes and challenges, and integration issues. We also met with computer systems staff to understand system changes and computer automation and integration issues. We met with training staff to understand the type and extent of training delivered for simplified reporting implementation and conferred with QC staff to learn about QC error issues associated with simplified reporting.

Table A.1. Case Study States by Selection Criteria

Simplified Reporting Design Choices	Study States			
	Arizona	Louisiana	Missouri	Ohio
1. Early simplified reporting implementer?	No January 2003	Yes August 2001	Yes May 2001	Yes July 2002
2. Implementing TBA?	Yes January 2003	No ^a	No	No
3. Simplified reporting certification period	12 months	12 months	6 months	6 months
4. Simplified reporting change response	Positive only	All (waiver)	Positive only	All (waiver)
5. Simplified reporting population covered	Earners and nonearners	Earners only ^b	Earners and nonearners	Earners only
6. Alignment of change reporting requirements of other programs with food stamp reporting requirements	FSP and TANF	FSP, TANF, and child care	None	None
7. Error rate ^c	5.27	5.78	9.77	6.5
8. FNS region ^d	7	5	6	4
9. Big state?	No	No	No	Yes

^aLouisiana has long-range plans to implement TBA.

^bLouisiana expanded simplified reporting to nonearners in July 2003, shortly after our site visit.

^cFY 2002 error rates; FY2002 national error rate was 8.26.

^d1 = Northeast; 2=Mid-Atlantic; 3=Southeast; 4=Midwest; 5=Southwest; 6=Mountain Plains; and 7=West.

Local Office Interviews. The local office interviews focused on understanding the details of how food stamp applications, recertifications, and changes under simplified reporting are processed and how the processes interact with other programs. We also held discussions with administrators and caseworkers both individually and in groups to understand what they like and do not like about simplified reporting and how it affects their workload, caseloads, QC errors, and other aspects of their day-to-day activities. In addition, we solicited their recommendations and suggestions. We observed client interviews to see first-hand how recertifications are conducted and to understand how reporting and renewal obligations are addressed.

Focus Groups. In Louisiana and Missouri, we conducted focus groups with a group of about 12 food stamp participants to understand their experiences in the FSP under simplified reporting, particularly with regard to retention and recertification. The participants represented a range of perspectives, including persons with and without

earnings, those who had received food stamp benefits before simplified reporting was implemented and those who first applied under the new policies, and those who had lost food stamps in the past. Focus group participants received a small cash payment in appreciation for their time and assistance and for reimbursement of child care and transportation costs.

We based our analysis of the case study data on detailed site visit narratives prepared after each site visit. The narratives summarized information collected in all state and local office interviews, discussions, and focus groups. They include detailed descriptions of (1) reasons for implementing simplified reporting (and TBA) and the policies adopted in each state; (2) design issues; (3) the process used to implement simplified reporting (and TBA); (4) how simplified reporting (and TBA) works in the local office, including recertifications, interim reports, and semiannual reports; (5) issues relating to the alignment of reporting requirements and certification periods of other major programs with food stamps; (6) the impact of simplified reporting (and TBA) on workload, caseload, access, and QC error rates; (7) field staff and client response to simplified reporting (and TBA); and (8) essential findings, important successes, and challenges. We used the detailed narratives to compare operations, approaches, and significant implementation issues across the four study states.