



# The Food and Nutrition Assistance Landscape: Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report

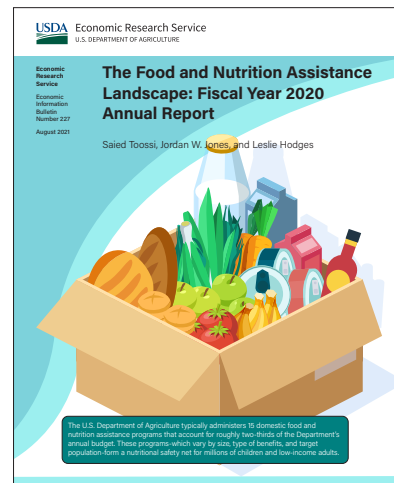
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## What Is the Issue?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) typically administers 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs that together affect the lives of millions of people and account for roughly two-thirds of USDA's annual budget. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, USDA launched two new programs, Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) and the Farmers to Families Food Box Program (Food Box Program). P-EBT reimbursed qualifying households for the value of school meals forgone due to COVID-19 related disruptions to in-person school attendance. Through the Food Box Program, USDA purchased food products from U.S.-based producers and donated them to food banks and other charitable organizations for distribution to households in need. Additionally, USDA implemented numerous policy changes that expanded the scope and coverage of existing programs. As a result, participation in and expenditures on these programs changed substantially. This report uses preliminary data from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to examine trends in the largest U.S. food and nutrition assistance programs through fiscal year (FY) 2020 (October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020). This report also documents policy changes that took effect since March 2020 and trends in economic and social indicators affecting participation in and spending on food and nutrition assistance programs. It also summarizes two recent USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) studies: one that examines the prevalence of household food insecurity in the United States in 2019; and another that examines Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and P-EBT benefit redemptions during the pandemic.

## What Did This Study Find?

Spending on USDA's domestic food and nutrition assistance programs in FY 2020 reached a historical high of \$122.1 billion, 32 percent greater than the previous year. Spending surpassed the previous inflation-adjusted historical high of \$119.8 billion in FY 2013 (\$109.2 billion in 2013 dollars). SNAP accounted for 65 percent of these expenditures (see figure below).



ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

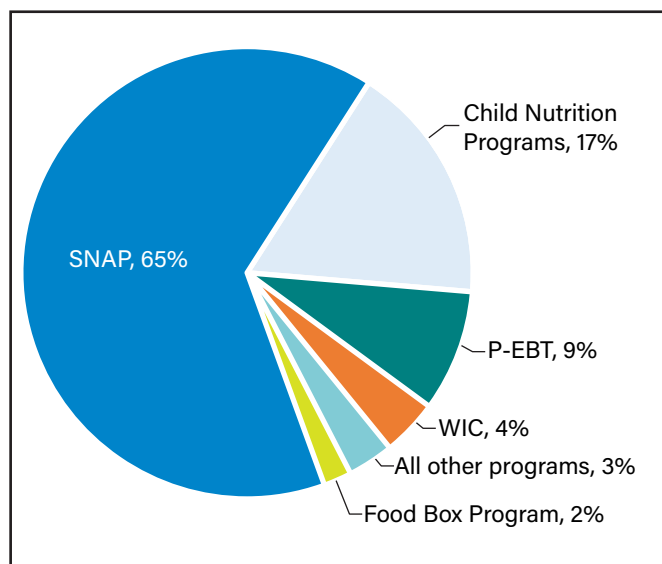
- On average, 39.9 million people participated in SNAP each month, 12 percent more than in the previous fiscal year. Additionally, emergency SNAP allotments were issued in the second half of FY 2020, supplementing the regular benefits of 60 percent of recipients. Higher participation and larger benefits translated to greater Federal spending on the program, which totaled \$78.9 billion, a 31-percent increase over the previous fiscal year.
- On average, 6.2 million people participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children each month, 2 percent fewer than the previous fiscal year. Total WIC spending was \$4.9 billion, 6 percent less than in FY 2019.
- Pandemic-related disruptions to child nutrition programs resulted in 7.9 billion total meals being served across the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), down 17 percent from FY 2019. While meals served through NSLP, SBP, and CACFP declined, the number of meals served through SFSP increased to 1.3 billion, nearly nine times greater than in FY 2019.
- P-EBT benefits reimbursed eligible families for missed school meals due to school closures at a cost of \$10.7 billion. The Food Box Program distributed 92 million boxes of produce, dairy, and meat products to food banks and other charitable organizations nationwide at a cost of \$2.5 billion.

## How Was the Study Conducted?

This report uses preliminary data as of January 2021 from USDA, FNS and USDA, AMS to examine program trends through FY 2020. It also includes trends in economic and social indicators that affect program participation and spending and highlights recent USDA, ERS research.

### USDA food and nutrition assistance expenditures by program, FY 2020

*SNAP accounted for nearly two-thirds of food and nutrition assistance spending*



Note: Figure based on preliminary data from the September 2020 Program Information Report (Keydata) released by USDA, Food and Nutrition Service in January 2021 and information provided by USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service.

FY = Fiscal year. SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. Child Nutrition Programs = National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program. P-EBT = Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer. All other programs = nutrition family assistance grants to Puerto Rico, the Northern Marianas, and American Samoa; the Commodity Supplemental Food Program; the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; the Nutrition Services Incentive Program; the Special Milk Program; Disaster Feeding; The Emergency Food Assistance Program; and nutrition programs administration. Food Box Program = Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service and Agricultural Marketing Service.