

Participation and Nonparticipation of Eligible Persons in the Food Stamp Program in Two Ohio Counties

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INTRODUCTION

This research circular provides information on Ohio's citizens eligible for food stamps. Social welfare practitioners, educators, legislators, and consumers should find this information helpful. The circular begins with a brief history of the food distribution and food stamp program in the United States. Following this, a description of the research design and statistical methods is presented. Findings are then reported under the following headings: 1) Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Heads of Households and Households, 2) Attitudes and Perceptions Toward the Food Stamp Program, 3) Information, 4) Transportation, and 5) Resources. Finally, findings are summarized and policy implications discussed.

History

The food stamp program had its beginning with the Potato Control Act of 1935. This act made financial resources available "to finance adjustments in agricultural production" and to purchase surplus farm commodities for distribution to the needy. The primary goal of the act was to support agricultural markets, with the concern for the needy a secondary concern. Dissatisfaction with the surplus commodity program in 1939 led to a food stamp plan in which certain stamps (blue) could only be used for surplus commodities, while a second type of stamp (orange) could be used for any food items. Both types of stamps could be used to buy food from authorized retailers. The food stamp program was discontinued in 1945 as unemployment fell and food surpluses disappeared.

During the next 20 years, while surplus commodity distribution continued, congressional interest grew in a revival of the food stamp program. Pilot programs, started in 1961, were successful. The pilot programs culminated in the passage of the Food Stamp Act of 1964. This act had two goals—to increase consumption of the nation's food, especially surpluses, and to improve the nutritional intake of low income people.

Since 1964 the food stamp program and related program costs have grown. The 1971 amendments of the Food Stamp Act of 1964 set uniform national income and resource eligibility standards, increased federal involvement in the program's administration, and led to increased program participation and program costs (13).

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A major amendment to the Food Stamp Act of 1964 (known as the Food Stamp Act of 1977) was effected through Title XIII of the Food and Agricultural Act of 1977. An objective of this act was to make it easier for eligible nonparticipating households to receive food aid (19). The 1977 act tightened eligibility standards to reduce program costs, eliminated the purchase requirement to encourage participation, and extended the program authorization through 1981. Without the purchase requirement, eligible participants received the bonus⁴ value of their coupons. Before this change, some eligible persons did not participate because the purchase price was too high (2, 16).

This circular addresses the issue of participation and nonparticipation among persons eligible for food stamps by identifying the distinguishing characteristics of the two groups. Although program participation and thus program costs have increased since 1977, research has shown that only about half of those who are eligible receive food stamps (8).

Objectives

This circular has four objectives:

- To identify those demographic characteristics of households and characteristics of heads of household which differentiate between food stamp participants and eligible nonparticipants.
- To identify those economic and mobility characteristics which distinguish food stamp participants from eligible nonparticipants.
- To identify those attitudes and perceptions about the food stamp program which differentiate participants from eligible nonparticipants.
- To identify the respondents' sources of information about the program and the respondents' access to the program.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYTICAL METHODS

Data Collection

The data used in this research were collected as part of North Central Regional Research Project NC-152, the Economic Consequences of the Food and Agricultural Act of 1977. A subproject of NC-152 focused on participation in the food stamp program brought about by Title XIII of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977. For this subproject, data were collected in four states —

⁴Prior to the enactment of the 1977 law, all food stamp participant households of a specified size were eligible to receive the same allotment of food coupons. Based upon income, each household paid a variable amount for those coupons. The difference between the total value of coupons received and the value of the cash payment is called bonus.

California, Indiana, Ohio, and Virginia. All of the households in the sample were eligible for the food stamp program.

The analyses reported in this circular utilize the Ohio data. After identifying those counties in Ohio with a poverty rate above the median rate for the state, according to census guidelines, one urban county and one rural county were selected. Both counties are in southwestern Ohio.

Households to be interviewed were chosen as follows. In Hamilton County, census tracts with an incidence of poverty above the median rate for Ohio (13.47%) were identified. Of the 55 tracts which met this criteria, 42 were randomly selected. Every third household in these tracts was screened for eligibility. In Clinton County, enumeration districts with poverty levels above the

median were identified. Districts were then randomly chosen for inclusion in the sample. All households in the selected enumeration districts were screened to determine eligibility. The sample data were collected between September 1979 and February 1980 by trained interviewers from the local areas. The household member primarily responsible for making decisions about purchase and preparation of food was interviewed.

Method of Analysis

Frequencies, percentiles, and means are used to describe characteristics of eligible households. The chi square test for independence was used to determine if participation/nonparticipation in the food stamp program was independent of selected variables.

TABLE 1.—Demographic and Socio-economic Profile of Food Stamp Eligible Households by Location of Residence.†

Characteristics	Urban Hamilton County		Rural Clinton County		Chi Square
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Household size (N = 206)					
1-2 members	55	52	48	48	
3-5 members	37	35	43	43	
6 or more members	13	12	10	10	
	<u>105</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>101</u>	
Age of household (N = 205)					
All members < 60 years	66	63	60	60	
All members ≥ 60 years	39	37	40	40	
	<u>105</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	
Age of household head (N = 204)					
18-34 years	37	35	36	36	
35-64 years	40	38	32	32	
65 or more years	28	27	31	31	
	<u>105</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>99</u>	
Sex of household head (N = 206)					
Male	48	46	60	59	*
Female	57	54	41	41	
	<u>105</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>100</u>	
Ethnic origin of head (N = 206)					**
White	62	59	98	98	
Non-white	43	41	2	2	
	<u>105</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	
Education of household head (N = 202)					**
Some grammar school	17	16	6	6	
Finished grammar school	15	14	26	27	
Some high school	48	46	31	32	
Finished high school	14	13	30	31	
Vocational training or college	11	11	4	4	
	<u>105</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>100</u>	
Length of employment of head (N = 60)					
Some parts of year	3	14	7	18	
All year	18	86	32	82	
	<u>21</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>100</u>	

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Percents may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

FINDINGS

Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Heads of Households and Households

Are there characteristics of households⁵ and household heads⁶ which distinguish food stamp participants from nonparticipants?

Characteristics analyzed were place of residence, household size, age of household, age of household head, sex of household head, ethnic origin of head, education of household head, and length of employment of head. Place of residence identifies households living in Hamilton County (urban) and Clinton County (rural). Table 1 shows the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in Hamilton and Clinton counties. The respondents in the two counties were similar in size of household, age distribution of the households and household heads, and length of employment of the household head.

Statistically significant differences between Hamilton County and Clinton County respondents exist with respect to sex of head, ethnic origin of the head, and educational attainment of the household head. Some 54% of the Hamilton County respondents were female headed households, while 41% of the Clinton County group were female headed. The percentage of non-whites in Hamilton County (41%) was much higher than in Clinton County (2%). In Hamilton County, 13% of the heads had completed high school compared with 31% in Clinton County. However, 11% of the household heads in Hamilton County had either vocational training or college, while in Clinton County only 4% of the household heads had this educational attainment.

Participation Status

The demographic and socio-economic characteristics were examined by participation status of the households (Table 2). Participation status is defined as participated or never participated. Households which were participating at the time of the interview or which had participated at any time in the past are participants. Nonparticipants are households which had never used food stamps (although they were eligible to use them at the time of the interview).

There was a statistically significant difference in participation by county, with participation greater in the urban area (Table 2). Of the eligible households which had never participated, 40% lived in Hamilton County and 60% lived in Clinton County.

Chi square analysis also showed a significant difference in participation by size of household (Table 2). Of those households which never participated, 66% had one or two members; of those households which did participate, 45% were one or two member households. However, 32% of those who never participated were in

three to five member households, while 40% of the participants lived in households of this size. Only 2% of the never participated households had six or more members, while 15% of households which did participate were this size.

Households were considered to be aged less than 60 years if all members were younger than 60, and were considered equal to or greater than 60 years if any member of the household was 60 years of age or older. The relationship between age of household and participation in the food stamp program was statistically significant (Table 2). Some 69% of the households which had participated were in the less than 60 category and 32% had at least one member in the household who was 60 years of age or more. This pattern was reversed in the never participated group; 43% had all members aged less than 60 years and 57% had at least one household member aged 60 years or older.

Age of head was significantly related to participation status. About 48% of those who had never participated were headed by a person who was 65 years of age or older (Table 2). However, of those who had participated, 21% were headed by a person in this age category.

Neither ethnic origin nor sex of the household head was significantly different between participants and nonparticipants. By sex of head, the numbers and percentages were very evenly distributed among respondents in both the participated and never participated groups (Table 2).

Educational attainment of the household head was similar for those who had participated and for those who had never participated. Of the 197 eligible households reporting information about the education of the head, only 43 were headed by a high school graduate. Fifteen had heads with vocational training or college (Table 2).

Length of employment was defined as working some parts of the year or working all year. Among the 44 participants, 80% reported that they worked all year. Among the 16 in the never participated group, all but one was employed all year (Table 2).

In summary, there were statistically significant differences between eligible households in Hamilton County and Clinton County by sex, ethnic origin, and educational attainment of household heads. The respondents in the two counties were similar in size of household, age distribution of households and household heads, and length of employment of household head.

With respect to participation status, *i.e.*, whether or not a household had participated or never participated in the food stamp program, there was a statistically significant difference in participation in the two counties; participation was greater in the urban county. There was also a significant difference between counties in household size, age of household, and age of household head. Participation was higher among younger households (all members less than 60 years old) or with heads less than 65. Households with one or two members were more likely to have never participated.

⁵A household includes all members who regularly live in a house and who share food supplies.

⁶The household head is the person identified as the head of the household by the person responding to the questionnaire.

TABLE 2.—Demographic and Socio-economic Profile of Food Stamp Eligible Households in Ohio by Participation Status.†

Characteristics	Participated		Never Participated		Chi Square
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Residence (N = 200)					*
Urban (Hamilton)	82	56	21	40	
Rural (Clinton)	65	44	32	60	
	147	100	53	100	
Household size (N = 200)					**
1-2 members	66	45	35	66	
3-5 members	59	40	17	32	
6 or more members	22	15	1	2	
	147	100	53	100	
Age of household (N = 199)					**
All members < 60 years	100	69	23	43	
All members ≥ 60 years	46	32	30	57	
	146	101	53	100	
Age of household head (N = 198)					**
18-34 years	55	38	18	35	
35-64 years	60	41	9	17	
65 or more years	31	21	25	48	
	146	100	52	100	
Sex of household head (N = 206)					
Male	71	48	27	51	
Female	76	52	26	49	
	147	100	53	100	
Ethnic origin of head (N = 199)					
White	110	75	46	87	
Non-white	36	25	7	13	
	146	100	53	100	
Education of household head (N = 197)					
Some grammar school	17	12	6	11	
Finished grammar school	30	21	10	19	
Some high school	56	39	20	38	
Finished high school	30	21	13	25	
Vocational training or college	11	8	4	8	
	144	101	53	101	
Length of employment of head (N = 60)					‡
Some parts of year	9	20	1	6	
All year	35	80	15	94	
	44	100	16	100	

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Percents may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

‡Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

Attitudes and Perceptions Toward the Food Stamp Program

Recognition of people's attitudes and perceptions is important since they can affect participation. The household respondents in the sample were asked four questions concerning their attitudes toward food stamps:

- What do you think about the food stamp program?
- How do you think the food stamp program should be changed?
- What changes would get you to participate?
- What advice would you give to a friend or relative who asked about participating in the food stamp program?

Answers to the question "What do you think about the food stamp program?" were put into three categories: liked the program, program is all right but needs change, and disliked the program. There was a statistically significant difference between participants and nonparticipants in their attitudes toward the program. Approval of the program was high in both groups (92% of the participants and 88% of the nonparticipants). However, a much higher percentage of those who never participated saw a need for change (52%) than did the participants (27%) (Table 3).

When attitudes toward the food stamp program were examined by county (Table 4), 71% of those who participated in Hamilton County and 55% of those who par-

ticipated in Clinton County liked the program. In both counties, those who had never participated cited need for change more often than did those who had participated. However, general approval was high in both counties.

Suggestions for changing the food stamp program were made by 107 households (Table 5). Among those who had participated, the two most frequent responses were "change use" and "change application and distribution" (24% and 21%, respectively). Some of the participants wanted to change the use of food stamps to be allowed to purchase paper and personal products but "not junk foods". Others who thought the application and distribution process should be changed suggested that it be made more convenient, that there be more branch offices, that the disabled be transported to the office or that stamps be mailed, and that the personnel be more pleasant. Among the 17 who had never participated, "prevent abuse and misuse" and "change eligibility" were the most frequent suggestions (35% each). Respondents who wanted to eliminate abuse and misuse thought the eligibility investigation should be tightened — "make sure the stamps go to the right people". Those who thought eligibility should be changed suggested that medical and utility bills be considered and that additional persons among the elderly should receive food stamps.

The question was asked, "What advice would you give to a friend or relative who asked you about the

TABLE 3.—Attitude Toward the Food Stamp Program by Participation Status of Responding Households in the Ohio Sample.

Attitude Toward Food Stamp Program	Respondent Group (N = 152)				Chi Square
	Participated		Never Participated		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent†	
Like the program	78	65	11	36	
All right, but needs change	33	27	16	52	*
Dislike the program	10	8	4	13	
	121	100	31	101	

†Percents may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 4.—Attitude Toward the Food Stamp Program by Participation Status of Responding Households in Hamilton and Clinton Counties.*

Attitude Toward Food Stamp Program	Hamilton County (N = 85)†				Clinton County (n = 67)			
	Participated		Never Participated		Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Like the program	51	71	4	31	27	55	7	39
All right, but needs change	17	24	7	54	16	33	9	50
Dislike the program	4	6	2	15	6	12	2	11
	72	101	13	100	49	100	18	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Percents may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

TABLE 5.—Suggestions for Changing the Food Stamp Program by Participation Status of Responding Households in the Ohio Sample.*

Suggested Improvements	Ohio Sample (N = 107)‡			
	Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent†	Number	Percent
Prevent abuse, misuse	14	16	6	35
Change value	12	13	2	12
Change use	22	24	2	12
Change eligibility	11	12	6	35
Change application and distribution process	19	21	1	6
No change is necessary	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	90	99	17	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Percents may not total 100 due to rounding.

‡Data by county are in the Appendix.

TABLE 6.—Advice Respondent Would Give a Friend or Relative Who Asked About the Food Stamp Program by Participation Status of Households in the Ohio Sample.*

Advice to be Given	Ohio Sample (N = 151)			
	Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent†	Number	Percent
If you need it, go for it	114	95	24	77
Do without them	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>23</u>
	120	100	31	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Data by county are in the Appendix.

TABLE 7.—Perceived Adequacy of Income of Respondents in the Ohio Sample by Participation Status.*

Adequacy of Income	Ohio Sample (N = 196)			
	Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent†	Number	Percent
Can afford about everything wanted and still save money	1	1	1	2
Can afford about everything wanted	1	1	4	8
Can afford what is needed and some wants	34	23	13	26
Can meet necessities only	72	50	16	31
Not at all adequate	<u>37</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>33</u>
	145	101	51	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

food stamp program?" Some 95% of those who had participated and 77% of those who had never participated would advise others to apply for the program if they needed it (Table 6).

Adequacy of Income

Households were asked the extent to which their income was sufficient. Table 7 contains the analysis of their responses by participation status. Of the 196 answering the question, 145 participated in the food stamp program. About 50% of the participants said they could afford necessities only, while 26% considered their income not at all adequate. In Clinton County, 35% of

the participants said their income was inadequate, while only 18% of the participants in Hamilton County made the same observation.

One-third (17) of the respondents who had never participated reported inadequate income and 31% (16) could only meet necessities. Eight (38%) of the never participated respondents in Hamilton County said their income met their needs and some of their wants, while five (17%) of the never participated group in Clinton County shared this perception about their income. These data raise the question about those 17 Ohioans (6 in Hamilton County and 11 in Clinton County) who perceive their income as not at all adequate, yet who have never participated in the food stamp program.

TABLE 8.—Perceived Adequacy of Income of Respondents in Hamilton and Clinton Counties by Participation Status.*

Adequacy of Income	Hamilton County (N = 101)†				Clinton County (N = 95)			
	Participated		Never Participated		Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Can afford about everything wanted and still save money	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	3
Can afford about everything wanted	1	1	1	5	0	0	3	10
Can afford what is needed and some wants	23	29	8	38	11	17	5	17
Can meet necessities only	43	53	6	29	30	46	10	33
Not at all adequate	14	18	6	29	23	35	11	37
	80	101	21	101	65	100	30	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

TABLE 9.—Main Reasons for Participating in the Food Stamp Program (N = 90).

Reason	Number	Percent
Main breadwinner temporarily unemployed (but not on strike)	8	9
Main breadwinner not working because of age	11	12
Main breadwinner not working because of physical problems or disability	25	28
Main breadwinner not working because of need to care for children	11	12
Went on welfare	8	9
There was a divorce or separation	5	6
Increase in food expenditures because of increase in number of household members	1	1
Increase in food expenditures because of inflation	9	10
Increase in expenses other than food	2	2
Other	9	10
Don't know	1	1
	<u>90</u>	<u>100</u>

TABLE 10.—Reasons Given for Discontinuing Participation In the Food Stamp Program (N = 84).

Response Category	Reason Given	Number	Percent
Lack of eligibility	Became ineligible	21	25
Lack of information	Purchase price too high	5	6
Benefits less than costs	Didn't get enough stamps to make it worthwhile	2	2
	Inconvenient to go to designated place to buy stamps	2	2
	Didn't like the treatment received from persons at food stamp office	3	4
	Didn't like the treatment from the persons providing food stamps	1	1
	Not permitted to buy household items, such as cleaning and paper products	2	2
	Didn't need food stamps any longer	13	16
	Pride would not allow me to be identified as a food stamp participant	3	4
Other	Other reasons	10	12
	No reason, don't know	22	26
		<u>84</u>	<u>100</u>

Reasons Given for Participating or Not Participating

Reasons for participating or not participating are presented in Tables 9, 10, and 11. Lack of employment due to temporary lay-off, age, physical problems, or need to care for children were the reasons for participation for 61% of the respondents (Table 9). About 7% of the respondents participated because of a change in the family composition: five noted divorce or separation and one reported an increase in number of members. Another 13% of the respondents indicated an increase in expenses. Among the respondents, 9% cited going on welfare as their main reason for using food stamps; the reasons they went on welfare would be of interest.

Households which were not participating at the time of the interview but had participated in the past were asked why they discontinued using food stamps. Responses were categorized as: lack of eligibility, lack of information, or the belief that costs were greater than benefits (6). One-fourth said they became ineligible. However, since all of the respondents were eligible at the time of the interview, the question arises as to why these people had not returned to the program.

About 31% said that they perceived the benefits they received were less than the costs of participating in the program, *i.e.* the time costs (inconvenience) or the psychic costs (didn't like the treatment) were too high to make up for the benefits derived from the stamps.

The 6% of the respondents who reported that purchase price was too high lack important information about the program. The purchase requirement was eliminated by the changes made in January 1979.

Eligible households who had never participated in the food stamp program were asked to state their reasons for nonparticipation (Table 11). The reasons were categorized as above — lack of eligibility, lack of information, and the perception that benefits are less than

costs. Lack of eligibility was given as the reason by 41% of the respondents. However, as all the respondents were eligible, their response shows a lack of information. Reasons which also reflected a lack of information were cited by 18% of the respondents.

In summary, approval of the program was high among both participants and those who had never participated. However, the latter group cited need for change more often than the former.

Most frequent suggestions for change among participants were to change use (allow food stamps to be used for personal goods and paper items) and change application and distribution processes to make them more convenient. Most frequent changes suggested by respondents who had never participated were to prevent abuse and misuse of food stamps and to change eligibility standards.

As would be expected, most of the participants reported that their income "met necessities only" or "was not adequate". This situation was also reported by many of those who had never participated. The 17 households (6 in Hamilton, 11 in Clinton County) which had never participated (yet reported that their incomes were "not at all adequate") raise the greatest concern.

Lack of employment was the main reason for participation in the food stamp program. Among households which were not participating at the time of interview, but had participated in the past, 25% said they discontinued use of food stamps because they became ineligible, and 31% reported reasons showing that they perceived benefits were less than costs (time costs and psychic costs). However, the 6% reporting the purchase price was too high showed a lack of information. Among the households which had never participated, this same response of lack of eligibility was made by 41% — again showing a lack of information.

TABLE 11.—Reasons for Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program Given by Persons Who Had Never Participated (N = 91).

Response Category	Reason	Number	Percent
Lack of eligibility	Not eligible	37	41
Lack of information	Didn't know anything about the program	9	10
	Didn't know where to apply for the program	2	2
	Didn't understand if I was eligible	4	4
	Purchase requirement too high	2	2
Benefits less than costs	Didn't need stamps	16	18
	Pride would not allow me to be identified as a food stamp recipient	3	3
Other	Other reasons	16	18
	Don't know	2	2
		91	100

INFORMATION

Accurate information about the food stamp program is important to the low income household. In this section, contact with information and information sources is analyzed. Respondents were asked these questions:

- In the past 6 months, have you received any information about the food stamp program from this list of sources?
- Was what you heard about *changes* in the food stamp program?

Answers to each question were analyzed by participation status and by location of residence. Information sources⁷ were classified as personal, media, and agency. Personal sources were friends or relatives. Media sources were television, radio, magazine, or newspaper. Agency sources were nutrition aide or technician,

⁷The list included 16 sources: friend, relative, T.V., radio, magazine, nutrition aide or technician, programs for the elderly, nurse, Extension agent, home economics teacher, welfare worker, food stamp representative, religious organizations, community agencies, other.

employee from a program for the elderly, welfare worker, food stamp representative, or workers with other community agencies.

Differences between participants and nonparticipants were statistically significant for information from agency sources and for hearing about changes in the program. There was little difference between respondents who participated and who never participated with regard to media sources and to personal sources (Table 12). Some 49% of those who participated had received information from an agency source, while this was true of only 18% of those who never participated. Participants were more likely to have received information about changes in the food stamp program than were nonparticipants. About 51% of those who participated and received information heard about changes, compared to 18% of those who never participated and received information.

When the information sources were analyzed by place of residence, there was no statistically significant difference between Hamilton and Clinton County respondents (Appendix II).

TABLE 12.—Information and Information Sources of Food Stamp Eligible Households in the Ohio Sample by Participation Status.

Information	Ohio Sample†				Chi Square
	Participated		Never Participated		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Personal source (N = 197)					
Yes	17	12	10	20	
No	129	88	41	80	
	146	100	51	100	
Agency source (N = 197)					**
Yes	72	49	9	18	
No	74	51	42	82	
	146	100	51	100	
Media source (N = 197)					
Yes	14	10	7	14	
No	132	90	44	86	
	146	100	51	100	
What heard was about changes in food stamp program (N = 108)					**
Yes	44	51	4	18	
No	42	49	18	82	
	86	100	22	100	

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Data by county are in the Appendix.

Relatives, Neighbors, Friends

Relatives, neighbors, and friends may be a source of information about the program — eligibility and processes of application as well as benefits and costs. Chi square analysis showed significant differences in responses between those who had participated and those who had never participated (Table 13). Of those participants reporting use of food stamps by relatives, neighbors, and friends, 36% had relatives, 79% had neighbors, and 63% had friends who were food stamp recipients. In contrast, of the nonparticipants reporting the same information, 18% had relatives, 55% had neighbors, and 34% had friends who used food stamps.

In summary, accurate information about the food stamp program is important to low income households. There was a statistically significant difference between participants and those who never participated

in receipt of information from agency sources. However, the percentage of participants and nonparticipants who received information from personal and media sources was similar.

As would be expected, the difference between participants and nonparticipants in having heard about changes in the food stamp program was statistically significant. A lack of information about changes in the program could well be the cause of eligible households not participating.

Relatives, neighbors, and friends who use food stamps can be useful information sources. While the statistically significant difference in the responses of participants and of those who had never participated may also show that low income people know other low income people, it may demonstrate the information value of knowing people who had experience with the program.

TABLE 13.—Households Reporting Use of Food Stamps by Relatives, Neighbors, Friends in the Ohio Sample by Participation Status.

Reported Use of Food Stamps	Ohio Sample†				Chi Square
	Participated		Never Participated		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Relatives (N = 184)					
Yes	48	36	9	18	*
No	85	64	42	82	
	133	100	51	100	
Neighbors (N = 100)					
Yes	63	79	11	55	*
No	17	21	9	45	
	80	100	20	100	
Friends (N = 138)					
Yes	65	63	12	34	**
No	38	37	23	66	
	103	100	34	100	

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Data by county are in the Appendix.

TRANSPORTATION

Respondents were asked two questions about transportation:

- Could you get to the nearest food stamp office?
- How do you usually get where you want to go?

Responses were analyzed by participation status, location of residence, age of household head, and age of household (Table 14). Food stamp eligible households were generally able to get to the nearest food stamp office. There was no statistically significant difference between participants and nonparticipants in their access to transportation for this trip.

When respondents were grouped by location of residence, there was a statistically significant difference by county. Of those (21) who could not get to the food stamp office, 95% lived in Clinton County.

Age of household head was divided into three categories: age 18-34, 35-64, and 65 or more. Chi square analysis showed a statistically significant difference among the age groups. Households with heads age 65 or

more have more difficulty getting to the food stamp office than households with younger heads. Of those unable to get to the food stamp office, 57% were headed by a person age 65 or more, 24% by a person 35-64 years, and 19% by a person 18-34 years.

When age of household was analyzed with respect to ability to get to the food stamp office, chi square analysis showed a statistically significant difference between households in which all members were less than 60 years of age or households in which at least one member was 60 years of age or older. Of those respondents unable to get to the food stamp office, 67% were from households with any member 60 years or older.

These results show that households living in Clinton County, households having a head aged 65 years or more, or households having any member aged 60 years or older were more likely to have difficulty getting to the food stamp office than households with younger heads or households with all members less than 60 years of age. While the numbers are small, the problem could be a major one for the households involved.

TABLE 14.—Demographic Profile of Food Stamp Eligible Households in Ohio by Ability to Get to the Food Stamp Office.

Attributes	Ohio Sample†				Chi Square
	Able to Get to Nearest Food Stamp Office		Unable to Get to Nearest Food Stamp Office		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Participation Status (N = 200)					
Participated	133	74	14	67	
Never participated	46	26	7	33	
	179	100	21	100	
Location of residence (N = 206)					
Urban (Hamilton)	104	56	1	5	**
Rural (Clinton)	81	44	20	95	
	185	100	21	100	
Age of household head (N = 204)					
18-34 years	69	38	4	19	*
35-64 years	67	37	5	24	
65 or more years	47	26	12	57	
	183	101	21	100	
Age of household head (N = 205)					
All members < 60	119	65	7	33	**
Any members ≥ 60	65	35	14	67	
	184	100	21	100	

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Data for mode of transportation are in the Appendix.

‡Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

RESOURCES

Aid in the form of financial, food and/or medical assistance, social insurance, or welfare may offset the participation decision of households. In this section, the receipt of additional resources is analyzed by participation status, place of residence, and age of household head.

Financial Assistance

Households were asked whether or not they received any financial assistance on a regular basis from friends, family, or employer. Financial assistance was defined as direct gifts of money, help with rent or mortgage payments, clothing, furniture, or other gifts, excluding food. Few households received financial help (Table 15). Financial assistance was not significantly related to participation or to county of residence. Of those who never participated in the food stamp program, 87% had no additional financial resources, while 93% of those who participated had none.

Food Assistance

Food assistance was defined as participation in any one of the following: the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), the school lunch program, the school breakfast program, the Women Infant and Children Program (WIC), or meals for the elderly programs. Households which participated in at least one of these programs were categorized as receiv-

ing food assistance. Households which did not participate in any of them were categorized as receiving no food assistance. Food assistance was significantly associated with food stamp participation status but not significantly associated with location of residence (Table 15).

Among households which never participated in the food stamp program, 81% received no other food assistance. Among those which had used food stamps, 44% received no other food assistance. There is little difference in the percentage of households receiving food assistance in an urban county (Hamilton) and a rural county (Clinton).

Medical Insurance

Households were asked whether they had any insurance to help pay medical bills. Medical assistance was defined as receiving any one of the following: Medicare, Medicaid, employer provided insurance, or individually paid medical insurance. Receipt of medical assistance is not significantly associated with either participation status or place of residence. More than 85% of the households in this study received some form of medical assistance (Table 15).

Social Insurance

Social insurance was defined as receipt of social security or unemployment compensation. Chi square analysis showed a statistically significant difference

TABLE 15.—Resource Profile of Food Stamp Eligible Households by Location of Residence and Participation Status.

Resource Type	Location of Residence (N = 206)†				Chi Square	Participation Status (N = 200)†				Chi Square
	Hamilton County		Clinton County			Participated		Never Participated		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Financial assistance										
Yes	12	11	6	6		11	8	7	13	
No	93	89	95	94		136	93	46	87	
	105	100	101	100		147	101	53	100	
Food assistance										
Yes	54	51	41	41		82	56	10	19	**
No	51	49	60	59		65	44	43	81	
	105	100	101	100		147	100	53	100	
Medical assistance										
Yes	97	92	87	86		130	88	49	92	
No	8	8	14	14		17	12	4	8	
	105	100	101	100		147	100	53	100	
Social Insurance										
Yes	42	40	55	55	*	62	43	31	59	*
No	63	60	46	46		85	57	22	42	
	105	100	101	101		147	100	53	101	
Welfare assistance										
Yes	66	63	28	28	**	81	55	12	23	**
No	39	37	73	72		66	45	41	77	
	105	100	101	100		147	100	53	100	

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

between residents of Hamilton and Clinton counties with respect to social insurance (Table 15). About 55% of respondents in Clinton County had some form of social insurance, while this was true of only 40% of Hamilton County households.

There was also a statistically significant difference between participants and nonparticipants in this respect. Some 43% of the participating households had social insurance, while 59% of those who had never participated had this security.

Welfare Assistance

Welfare assistance was defined as receiving assistance from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplementary Security Income (SSI), and/or General Assistance. Households which were beneficiaries of any of these welfare programs were classified as receiving welfare assistance. Those which did not receive assistance from at least one of these programs were classified as not receiving welfare assistance.

Chi square analysis showed a statistically significant difference between welfare assistance and participation status. Households which received welfare assistance were more likely to participate in the food stamp program than those which did not receive any form of welfare. Of those who never participated in the food stamp program, 77% were not welfare recipients, while 55% of those who had participated were welfare recip-

ients (Table 15). In chi square analysis of welfare assistance by location of residence, the receipt of welfare was significantly related to county of residence. In Hamilton County, 63% of the respondents received welfare assistance, while 72% of the respondents in Clinton County did not receive welfare assistance.

Age of Household Head

Receipt of each of the resource types was analyzed with respect to age of head (Table 16). Chi square analysis showed that only the receipt of food assistance and social insurance was statistically related to age of head. The older the head, the less food assistance was obtained. As would be expected, the reverse was true with respect to social insurance — 92% of the oldest household group received social insurance while only 14% of the youngest group received any form of insurance. Some 12% of the youngest group and 12% of the oldest group received some financial assistance.

Summary

In this section, the relationship between receipt of aid or back-up resources was analyzed with respect to participation status, county of residence, and age of household head. Few families received financial assistance, while most families had some type of medical assistance. Additional welfare assistance was more common in Hamilton County (63%) than in Clinton County

TABLE 16.—Resource Profile of Food Stamp Eligible Households by Age of Head of Household.

Resource Type	18-34 years		35-64 years		65 and more years		Chi Square
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent†	
Financial assistance (N = 204)							
Yes	9	12	2	3	7	12	
No	64	88	70	97	52	88	
	73	100	72	100	59	100	
Food assistance (N = 204)							
Yes	44	60	38	53	12	20	**
No	29	40	34	47	47	80	
	83	100	72	100	59	100	
Medical assistance (N = 204)							
Yes	65	89	62	86	55	93	
No	8	11	10	14	4	7	
	73	100	72	100	59	100	
Social insurance (N = 204)							
Yes	10	14	32	44	54	92	**
No	63	86	40	56	5	9	
	73	100	72	100	59	101	
Welfare assistance (N = 204)							
Yes	36	49	34	47	24	41	
No	37	51	38	53	35	59	
	73	100	72	100	59	100	

**Statistically significant at the .01 level.

†Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

(28%), but the counties were similar with respect to financial assistance, food assistance, and medical assistance.

Among all age groups, receipt of medical assistance was high and financial assistance was low. There is cause for concern about those families in all age groups with no medical assistance.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study were to identify factors which differentiated households which had participated in the food stamp program from those which had never participated. The data analyzed here were collected in Hamilton and Clinton counties between September 1979 and February 1980. All households interviewed were eligible for the food stamp program.

Statistically significant differences existed between the two counties with respect to sex of head, ethnic origin of head, and educational attainment of household head. Heads of households in Hamilton County were more likely to be female, black, and high school graduates, while heads in Clinton County were more likely to be white males with less than a high school diploma.

Participation was greater in the urban county (Hamilton). Households with all members less than 60 years old were more likely to participate than households with any member age 60 years or more. Generally, food stamp households were larger (three or more members) than households which never used food stamps (one or two members).

Generally, households eligible for food stamps — both those which participated and never participated — approved of the program. However, those who had never participated more often cited need for change. Participants most often suggested that policies be changed to allow food stamps to be used for a wider range of items; *i.e.*, personal goods and paper items. They also would like the application and distribution process be made more convenient. Households which had never participated urged that abuse and misuse be curbed and that eligibility standards be changed.

Lack of employment was reported as the primary reason for using food stamps. Those who had participated at one time, but discontinued use of food stamps, cited reasons which reflected a perception that costs of participation exceeded benefits received. These findings concur with MacDonald's conclusion that households participate when their need is great (13).

Lack of information or erroneous information was often a cause of nonparticipation. Welfare workers and food stamp representatives were the most frequently cited sources of information by food stamp participants.

Most eligible households could get to the food stamp office; however, there was a statistically significant difference by county, age of household head, and age of household. Clinton County households, households with heads aged 65 years or more, and households having any member aged 60 years or older were more likely to have transportation problems.

The availability of food assistance, social insurance, and other welfare programs was related to participa-

tion status. Those who never participated in the food stamp program were less likely to participate in other food assistance (EFNEP, school lunch or breakfast, WIC) and income maintenance programs (AFDC, SSI, and/or GA) than those who participated. Participants were less likely to receive benefits from social insurance (social security and unemployment compensation) than those who never participated.

Discussion

The food stamp program appears to be working well in the two counties studied. Most of the eligible households approved of the program and would encourage others to participate if they needed the help. However, two problems became apparent from the analyses:

- The lack of adequate information among some food stamp eligible households.
- The presence of eligible households which have never participated, yet may need the program.

These two problems can overlap in that households with few social contacts may also have little access to sources of information. Elderly households may be the prime example of this group.

Information about the food stamp program is important to low income households. Policy changes, such as elimination of the purchase price, will not improve participation rates among those who do not know about them. Families need to know about eligibility criteria, about costs and benefits to be derived, and about changes in the program so they can make appropriate decisions.

It is clear that welfare workers are useful sources of information to participants. Lane and Kushman (11) note that these workers will probably continue to be the most used source of information, but they do not reach those who do not have contact with these agencies. The problem of adequate information is made more difficult by the low levels of education of the heads of the eligible families.

The second problem affects fewer people than the lack of information, but may have more serious effects. This problem is the identification of households which have never participated in the food stamp program but appear to need the help available. An example of "at risk" households are the 17 Ohioans (6 in Hamilton County, 11 in Clinton County) who perceive their income to be "not at all adequate," yet have never participated in the food stamp program. Such households may have inadequate food and nutritional intakes and related health problems.

Generally, getting to the food stamp office was not a problem for the respondents and there was no statistically significant difference between participants and nonparticipants in access to transportation for this purpose. However, not surprisingly, households living in the rural county and/or households having any member aged 60 years or older or having a head aged 65 years or older were more likely to have difficulty getting to the food stamp office than younger households or those living in the urban area. Again, the numbers are small, but the problem could well be serious for those involved.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX TABLE I.—Advice Respondents Would Give to a Friend or Relative Who Asked About the Food Stamp Program by Participation Status of Households in Hamilton and Clinton Counties.*

Advice to be Given	Hamilton County (N = 80)				Clinton County (N = 71)			
	Participated		Never Participated		Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
If you need it, go for it	64	93	11	100	50	98	13	65
Do without them	5	7	0	0	1	2	7	35
	69	100	11	100	51	100	20	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis

APPENDIX TABLE II.—Suggestions for Changing the Food Stamp Program by Participation Status of Responding Households in Hamilton and Clinton Counties.*

Suggested Improvements	Hamilton County (N = 61)†				Clinton County (N = 46)†			
	Participated		Never Participated		Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Prevent abuse, misuse	7	13	2	25	7	19	4	44
Change value	9	17	2	25	3	8	0	0
Change use	9	17	1	13	13	35	1	11
Change eligibility	7	13	2	25	4	11	4	44
Change application and distribution process	14	26	1	13	5	14	0	0
No change is necessary	7	13	0	0	5	14	0	0
	53	99	8	101	37	101	9	99

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis

†Percents may not total 100 due to rounding.

APPENDIX TABLE III.—Information and Information Sources of Food Stamp Eligible Households in the Ohio Sample by Place of Residence.

Information	Ohio Sample				Chi Square†
	Hamilton County		Clinton County		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Personal source (N = 198)					
Yes	13	13	14	15	
No	<u>89</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>85</u>	
	102	100	96	100	
Agency source (N = 198)					
Yes	44	43	38	40	
No	<u>58</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>60</u>	
	102	100	96	100	
Media source (N = 198)					
Yes	9	9	12	12	
No	<u>93</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>88</u>	
	102	100	96	100	
What heard was about changes in food stamp program (N = 109)					
Yes	22	42	27	48	
No	<u>31</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>52</u>	
	53	100	56	100	

†Not statistically significant.

APPENDIX TABLE IV.—Information and Information Sources of Food Stamp Eligible Households in Hamilton and Clinton Counties by Participation Status.*

Information	Hamilton County†				Clinton County			
	Participated		Never Participated		Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Personal source (N = 197)								
Yes	9	11	4	20	8	12	6	19
No	73	89	16	80	56	88	25	81
	82	100	20	100	64	100	31	100
Agency source (N = 197)								
Yes	40	49	4	20	32	50	5	16
No	42	51	16	80	32	50	26	84
	82	100	20	100	64	100	31	100
Media source (N = 197)								
Yes	7	9	2	10	7	11	5	16
No	75	92	18	90	57	89	26	84
	82	101	20	100	64	100	31	100
What heard was about changes in the food stamp program (N = 108)								
Yes	21	48	1	11	23	55	3	23
No	23	52	8	89	19	45	10	77
	44	100	9	100	42	100	13	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

APPENDIX TABLE V.—Households Reporting Use of Food Stamps by Relatives, Neighbors, or Friends in Hamilton and Clinton Counties by Participation Status.*

Reported Use of Food Stamps	Hamilton County†				Clinton County†			
	Participated		Never Participated		Participated		Never Participated	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Relatives (N = 184)								
Yes	32	43	7	33	16	27	2	7
No	42	57	14	67	43	73	28	93
	74	100	21	100	59	100	30	100
Neighbors (N = 100)								
Yes	47	86	6	50	16	64	5	63
No	8	15	6	50	9	36	3	38
	55	101	12	100	25	100	8	101
Friends (N = 138)								
Yes	47	69	9	47	18	51	3	19
No	21	31	10	53	17	49	13	81
	68	100	19	100	35	100	16	100

*Expected cell frequency too small for chi square analysis.

†Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

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