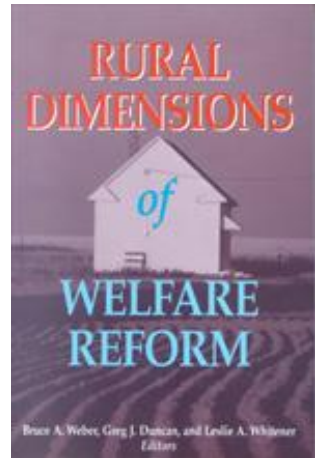

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The Decline in Food Stamp Use by Rural Low-Income Households: Less Need or Less Access?

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The Decline in Food Stamp Use by Rural Low-Income Households

Less Need or Less Access?

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The Food Stamp program is the largest federal food assistance program and a mainstay of the federal safety net. In 1994, prior to the recent declines in food stamp participation, more than 1 in every 10 Americans, some 27.5 million people, benefited from the program.

From 1994–1998, food stamp caseloads declined dramatically, falling 34 percent in four years (Genser 1999; Wilde et al. 2000). Cash welfare caseloads also declined dramatically during this period. In non-metropolitan areas, declines were substantial, although somewhat smaller than in metropolitan areas, at least in the early part of the period (RUPRI 1999; Reinschmiedt et al. 1999).

A great deal of research has looked at the causes of these declines, especially the role of the economy, and intended and unintended effects of welfare reform. Fewer studies have assessed whether the changes in cash welfare use have resulted in improved or worsening economic well-being of potential users. These studies have generally found that economic well-being has not improved and may have deteriorated for these households (Primus et al. 1999). To date, there has been no such assessment of the changes in food stamp use on household well-being. In this chapter, we analyze data on household food insecurity and hunger in 1995 and 1999 to assess whether the decline in food stamp use was associated with an improvement or a deterioration in the food security of U.S. households. The analysis is carried out at both the national level and in nonmetro areas to explore the possibly different welfare outcomes in these two areas (RUPRI 1999).

LESS NEED FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE, OR LESS ACCESS TO FOOD STAMPS?

Much of the decline in food stamp caseloads from 1994–1998 resulted from the economic expansion, which lowered unemployment and raised incomes, thus reducing both eligibility and the perceived need for food stamps among eligible households (Wilde et al. 2000). However, food stamp participation declined even among lower-income households, most of which were eligible for food stamps.¹ At the national level, about 55 percent of the overall decline in food stamp caseloads from 1994–1998 resulted from a decline in participation among low-income households (Wilde et al. 2000).

This chapter takes a closer look at those low-income households. Did fewer households apply for food stamps because fewer believed they needed food assistance? Or was it because they found it more difficult or less socially acceptable to get food stamps? This is a question of some importance to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which is responsible for ensuring that food stamps are readily available to all eligible households. States and local communities also want to know if needy households are receiving the food assistance available to them.

The decline in food stamp use among low-income households does not, by itself, demonstrate that access to food stamps has become more restricted or difficult. There are several reasons why an improved economy could lower participation even among eligible households. For example, eligible households may have more stable income, even though still below the eligibility level, and may therefore perceive less need for food assistance. They may, on average, have higher income, and therefore be eligible for a smaller total food stamp benefit, thus reducing their incentive to apply for food stamps. They may be more confident of their ability to secure a job in the near future and may, therefore, spend down assets or borrow to meet immediate food needs rather than apply for food stamps.

Nevertheless, changes in the Food Stamp program under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) did tighten access to food stamps for some groups, especially for aliens and for able-bodied working-age persons without de-

pendents, and the act slightly reduced benefit levels available to most eligible persons. Further, there is evidence that changes in cash welfare programs have indirectly reduced access to the Food Stamp program because families losing cash welfare assistance, or not qualifying for cash assistance, do not always know they are eligible for food stamps (Zedlewski and Brauner 1999).

These two forces—declining need for and access to food stamps—both likely to reduce food stamp participation, converged in the latter half of the 1990s. Assessing the role of changing access in the caseload decline during a period when these two forces converged poses a difficult analytic challenge. However, data on household food security can shed light on this issue. The USDA sponsors an annual survey, conducted by the Census Bureau, that collects information about food security, food insecurity, and hunger in U.S. households (Bickel, Carlson, and Nord 1999). The household food security scale, which is calculated from these data, is a direct measure of conditions that the Food Stamp program is designed to ameliorate—food insecurity and hunger. Food security status can be used as a measure of households' perceived need for food assistance, thus providing an analytic tool to answer the "less need versus less access" question.

The analysis focuses on low-income (most of whom are eligible for food stamps) families not receiving food stamps. On the one hand, if households that were eligible for (but not receiving) food stamps were "food secure," then it may reasonably be inferred that they did not believe they needed food assistance. On the other hand, if such households were food insecure or, especially, if household members went hungry, these households likely needed food assistance but found it difficult, impossible, or socially unacceptable to get food stamps.

Similarly, changes in the food security status of low-income households not receiving food stamps during a period of rapidly declining caseloads shed light on the reasons for the decline. If food stamp use declined among low-income households because their perceived need declined, either due to improved economic situations or for other reasons, then the prevalence rate of food insecurity and hunger among low-income households not receiving food stamps would have remained unchanged (or perhaps declined). Alternatively, if food stamp use declined among low-income households because they found it more difficult to get food stamps, or because some of them were ineli-

gible or were unaware they were eligible, then the prevalence rate of food insecurity and hunger among low-income households not receiving food stamps would have increased.

This chapter also analyzes changes in the prevalence of food insecurity among low-income food stamp–recipient households. However, it is less clear what the changes for these households imply about the roles of “less need” and “less access” in the caseload decline. Improvements in the economy would be expected to improve incomes among those still receiving food stamps, thus reducing average food insecurity and hunger. Reduced access to cash welfare would lower incomes, increasing food insecurity and hunger. Program changes that reduce the value of food stamps might also tend to increase food insecurity and hunger among recipients. However, all of these effects are likely to be swamped by changes due to the characteristics of households that left the food stamp rolls. Given that the least needy are most likely to have left the program, those left behind are likely to have greater levels of food insecurity and hunger, thus increasing the prevalence of these conditions among food stamp recipients.

Alternatively, if there was less access to food stamps, those leaving (or not applying) may not have been the least needy; they could include a substantial number of more needy households as well. Because of these uncertainties, it is impossible to clearly link changes in food security among food stamp recipients to reduced need versus reduced access to food stamps. This analytic difficulty is partially overcome by assessing changes over time in food insecurity and hunger among food stamp recipients and nonrecipients while controlling for changes in income distribution. However, this only partly controls for well-being, and the meaning of the observed changes for food stamp recipient households remains somewhat ambiguous.

Data and Methods

Data used in this analysis are from the April 1995 and April 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS) Food Security Supplements and the associated labor force “core” survey. The Food Security Supplements are sponsored by USDA and conducted by the Census Bureau along with the CPS once each year. The CPS includes a nationally representative sample of some 50,000 households, about 44,000 of which com-

plete the Food Security supplements. The supplements include questions about household food expenditures, sources of food assistance, food insecurity, and hunger.

The food insecurity and hunger questions ask about a wide range of experiences and behaviors that are known to characterize households having difficulty meeting their food needs. A scale based on 18 of these questions has been developed to measure the severity of food insecurity and hunger, ranging from food secure to severe hunger (Hamilton et al. 1997a, b; Price, Hamilton, and Cook 1997; Bickel et al. 2000). All the scale questions refer to the 12 months prior to the survey and include a qualifying phrase reminding the respondent to report only those occurrences due to limited financial resources. Restrictions to food intake due to dieting or busy schedules are excluded. For analytic purposes, each household is classified into one of three categories based on their food security scale score: 1) food secure, 2) food insecure with no hunger evident, and 3) food insecure with hunger (Hamilton et al. 1997a; Bickel et al. 2000).

Households were classified by income (below, or at or above, 130 percent of the poverty line) and by household composition (two-parent families with children, single-mother families, multi-adult households without children, men living alone, and women living alone). Households in which the reference person was not a U.S. citizen were analyzed as a separate category, irrespective of their household composition because most noncitizens became ineligible for cash assistance and food stamps during the period under study as a result of welfare reform.

Food stamp receipt was referenced to the previous 30 days in the 1995 CPS but to the previous year in the 1999 CPS. To make the 1999 classification comparable, receipt and nonreceipt of food stamps in the prior 30 days was calculated based on month and date of last food stamp receipt.

Prevalence of food insecurity (with or without hunger) and of hunger was calculated for categories defined by income, food stamp receipt, and household composition. These prevalences were compared between 1995 and 1999. Appropriate household weights were used for calculating prevalence rates, and standard errors of the estimates were calculated based on the number of unweighted cases and an assumed design factor of 1.6 for national prevalence and 2.4 for nonmetro prevalence.²

FINDINGS

National Level: Food Stamp Caseload Decline

The important contribution of rising incomes to the decline in food stamp use that was reported by Wilde et al. (2000) is also observed in the Food Security Supplement data. The proportion of households with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line declined from 24 percent in 1995 to 19 percent in 1999 (Table 15.1). Adjusted for population growth, this represented a decline of 21 percent in the low-income, generally food-stamp-eligible, population.

Even among low-income households, food stamp use declined by more than one-third (also consistent with Wilde et al. 2000). Declines were largest for noncitizens (57.3 percent) and for two-parent families with children (41.2 percent) and were smallest for women living alone (23.8 percent). In absolute terms, the decline was largest for single mothers (21.0 percentage points). This large decline is of particular interest analytically because single mothers represented about 40 percent

Table 15.1 Changes in Household Income and Food Stamp Use, 1995–99

Household characteristic	1995 (%)	1999 (%)	Change	
			Pct. pt.	%
Share with income below 130% of poverty	24.2	19.1	-5.1	-21.0
Share of low-income hh. that received food stamps in prior month				
All low-income hh.	32.2	20.2	-12.0	-37.4
Aliens	33.1	14.1	-19.0	-57.3
Citizens	32.1	20.9	-11.2	-34.8
Two-parent with children	31.5	18.5	-13.0	-41.2
Single mother with children	63.5	42.5	-21.0	-33.2
Multi-adult with no children	15.8	10.1	-5.7	-36.2
Men living alone	18.2	11.2	-7.0	-38.5
Women living alone	21.8	16.6	-5.2	-23.8

SOURCE: Calculated by ERS using data from Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, April 1995 and April 1999.

of all low-income households that received food stamps in 1995. Further, there is concern that some of these families stopped receiving food stamps because they did not know they were still eligible after leaving cash welfare (Zedlewski and Brauner 1999).

National Level: Changes in Food Insecurity and Hunger

At the national level, food insecurity declined by 1.7 percentage points from 1995 to 1999 (Table 15.2). Food insecurity is closely linked to income, and the decline in food insecurity from 1995 to 1999 can be accounted for entirely by higher incomes in 1999. The association between income and food insecurity was virtually unchanged from 1995 to 1999 (Figure 15.1). In fact, the small change that did occur would have resulted in a slight increase (about 0.1 percentage point; analysis not shown) in food insecurity during the period, but this was more than offset by the upward shift in the income distribution.

The important role of higher income in the decline of food insecurity is reflected also by the changes in food insecurity at different income levels (Table 15.2). The prevalence of food insecurity declined slightly among medium-income and higher-income households (income more than 130 percent of the poverty line), and registered a sta-

Figure 1 Food Insecurity by Income (1995 and 1999 estimated independently)

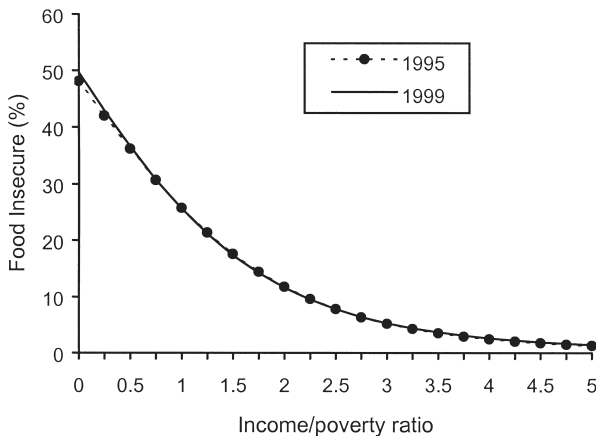


Table 15.2 Changes in Household Food Insecurity and Hunger, 1995–1999

Household characteristic	Food insecurity (with or without hunger)			Hunger		
	1995 (%)	1999 (%)	Change (pct. pt.)	1995 (%)	1999 (%)	Change (pct. pt.)
All households	11.8	10.1	−1.7*	4.2	2.9	−1.3*
Medium- and high-income	6.2	5.6	−0.6*	1.9	1.3	−0.6*
Low-income	31.5	32.4	0.9	11.9	10.7	−1.2*
Low-income hh. not receiving food stamps in prior month	23.2	28.2	5.0*	8.8	8.9	0.1
Aliens	33.3	34.2	0.9	12.1	9.3	−2.8
Citizens	22.1	27.4	5.3*	8.4	8.8	0.4
Two-parent with children	26.6	32.0	5.6*	6.4	6.1	−0.3
Single mother with children	36.3	41.4	5.1	14.9	11.1	−3.8*
Multi-adult with no children	16.8	20.9	4.1*	6.3	8.3	2.0
Men living alone	23.9	29.7	5.8*	12.8	12.1	−0.7
Women living alone	16.9	19.9	3.0*	6.7	8.0	1.3

Low-income hh. receiving food stamps in prior month	48.9	48.8	-0.1	18.6	17.9	-0.7
Aliens	51.5	52.7	1.2	17.3	17.7	0.4
Citizens	48.6	48.5	-0.1	18.8	17.9	-0.9
Two-parent with children	49.5	52.4	2.9	17.4	10.9	-6.5
Single mother with children	51.3	47.5	-3.8	19.0	15.3	-3.7
Multi-adult with no children	46.8	43.6	-3.2	16.7	23.6	6.9
Men living alone	54.9	55.6	0.7	33.8	24.7	-9.1
Women living alone	38.6	50.2	11.6*	15.3	24.6	9.3*

NOTE: * = change was significant at a 90% confidence level.

SOURCE: Calculated by ERS using data from Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, April 1995 and April 1999.

tistically insignificant increase of 0.9 percentage point among low-income households (income less than 130 percent of the poverty line). Clearly, the major factor in the improved food security was the reduced proportion of households falling in the low-income category.

It is unclear *a priori* how, or to what extent, the distribution of income within the low-income category may have changed from 1995 to 1999. On the one hand, an improved economy might generally raise incomes throughout the lower end of the distribution. On the other hand, the improved economy might primarily benefit those who were most attached to the labor market and thus falling not too far below the low-income cutoff. If those “escaping” from low-income status were primarily from among this less needy group, the remaining low-income households might have lower average income in 1999 than in 1995. Analysis of the relation between income and food insecurity (not shown) indicated that, in fact, the overall incomes in the low-income category improved slightly from 1995 to 1999. Holding constant the relation between income and food insecurity as observed in 1995, increases in income from 1995 to 1999 would have resulted in a small decline in food insecurity (−0.31 percentage point). This decline was more than offset by other factors so that food insecurity registered a small (not statistically significant) increase of 0.9 percentage point.

For low-income households not receiving food stamps, the prevalence of food insecurity increased by 5 percentage points (Table 15.2). This represented an increase in food insecurity of 21.6 percent (5.0 as a percentage of 23.2). This rather large increase in food insecurity suggests that much of the decline in food stamp receipt by low-income households resulted from decreased access to food stamps, not from lessening need for food assistance. Income distribution changed little within this group, and only 0.32 percentage point of the increase in the prevalence of food insecurity was due to the change in income distribution (analysis not shown).

The increase in food insecurity among low-income households not receiving food stamps was widespread, affecting all household types (Table 15.2). Among U.S. citizens, increases in the prevalence of food insecurity were substantial and similar in magnitude for all household types, except women living alone. Even for this latter category, observed food insecurity increased by 3 percentage points. Women living alone also experienced the smallest proportional decline in food stamp

receipt (Table 15.1), which may explain the smaller deterioration in food security observed.

Among households not receiving food stamps, noncitizens registered a smaller, and statistically insignificant, increase in food insecurity compared with citizen households. This is unexpected given that noncitizens were affected more by welfare program changes than were citizens, and they experienced a sharper decline in food stamp receipt.

Changes in the prevalence of hunger were less consistent than changes in food insecurity. The prevalence of hunger declined among low-income households by 1.2 percentage points (Table 15.2). Low-income households not receiving food stamps registered almost no change in hunger rates. The largest, and only statistically significant, change in the hunger rate among low-income households not receiving food stamps was for single-mother families (a decline of 3.8 percentage points). The combination of widespread increases in food insecurity, but little or no change (or even declines) in hunger among low-income households not receiving food stamps suggests that the most needy households—those facing hunger without food assistance—were still able to access food stamps. Even so, it is a sobering thought that in 8.8 percent of low-income households not receiving food stamps, people were hungry at some time during the year because they could not afford enough food.

Among low-income households that received food stamps, there was almost no change in the prevalence of food insecurity, and the slight reduction in the prevalence of hunger was not statistically significant. Interpreting changes in food security for households receiving food stamps is complicated by uncertainty about how changes in Food Stamp program participation might have affected the makeup of the population still receiving food stamps in 1999. Of particular interest is the extent to which less needy households may have exited the program, leaving behind only the more needy households. However, analysis of the association of income and food insecurity indicates that incomes rose slightly among low-income food-stamp-recipient households from 1995 to 1999 and would have reduced food insecurity among these households by 0.25 percentage points in the absence of any other changes. Thus, to the extent that income stands as a proxy for overall need, either changes in composition of the food stamp population due to the smaller caseload were small, or they were offset by

changes in income owing either to the improved economy, or to changes in cash welfare programs, or to the combined effects of both.

The most remarkable change among food stamp recipients was the large increase in the prevalence of both food insecurity and hunger among low-income women living alone. Low-income women living alone registered a smaller decline in receipt of food stamps than other groups (Table 15.1), so change in composition seems unlikely to account for these large increases. This is confirmed by the fact that the income distribution of low-income women living alone who received food stamps changed little from 1995 to 1999, and the small change that did occur was positive; that is, it would have resulted in a slight reduction in food insecurity in the absence of any other changes (analysis not shown). The reduction in food stamp benefit levels required by PRWORA could be a partial explanation of the increase in food insecurity and hunger among women who received food stamps, but that reduction also was relatively small.

Nonmetropolitan Households: Food Stamp Caseload Decline

In nonmetro areas, as at the national level, increasing incomes contributed substantially to the decline in food stamp use. The proportion of nonmetro households with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line declined from 30.7 percent in 1995 to 25.1 percent in 1999 (Table 15.3). Adjusted for population change, this represented a decline of 18.1 percent in the size of the nonmetro low-income population—a decline somewhat smaller than that for the nation as a whole (21 percent; see Table 15.1).³

As at the national level, food stamp use among low-income, nonmetro households also declined substantially. For citizen-headed households, the observed decline in nonmetro areas was somewhat smaller than at the national level (33.9 percent in nonmetro areas compared with 37.4 percent at the national level), but this nonmetro/national difference was not statistically significant. In all citizen-headed household categories, the differences between nonmetro and national declines were small and not statistically significant. The large decline in food stamp use registered for nonmetro, low-income, noncitizen households should be interpreted with caution given that this sample was quite small ($N = 69$ households).

Table 15.3 Changes in Income and Food Stamps in Nonmetropolitan Households, 1995–99

Household characteristic	1995 (%)	1999 (%)	Change	
			Pct. pt.	%
Proportion of households with income below 130% of poverty	30.7	25.1	-5.6	-18.2
Proportion of low-income hh. that received food stamps in prior month				
All low-income hh.	30.3	20.0	-10.3	-33.9
Aliens	27.4	1.9	-25.5	-93.2
Citizens	30.4	20.6	-9.8	-32.3
Two-parent with children	30.2	20.9	-9.3	-30.7
Single mother with children	59.8	40.1	-19.7	-32.9
Multi-adult with no children	17.5	9.2	-8.3	-47.4
Men living alone	16.7	13.9	-2.8	-16.7
Women living alone	24.9	19.0	-5.9	-23.8

SOURCE: Calculated by ERS using data from Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, April 1995 and April 1999.

Nonmetropolitan Households: Changes in Food Insecurity and Hunger

Food insecurity and hunger declined somewhat among nonmetro households from 1995–1999 (Table 15.4). This was primarily a result of improved incomes. Among low-income, nonmetro households, food insecurity was unchanged, and the slight decline in hunger was not statistically significant. As at the national level, income distribution changed very little within the low-income category, and its effect on food insecurity in nonmetro areas was negligible.

Food insecurity increased among nonmetro, low-income households not receiving food stamps, and the increase for citizen-headed households in this category (4.7 percentage points) was similar in magnitude to the corresponding increase at the national level (5.3 percentage points). The increase in food insecurity was less consistent across household types in nonmetro areas than it was at the national level. Increases in food insecurity for households with children were smaller

Table 15.4 Changes in Food Insecurity and Hunger in Nonmetropolitan Households, 1995–99

Household characteristic	Food insecurity (with or without hunger)			Hunger		
	1995 (%)	1999 (%)	Change (pct. pt.)	1995 (%)	1999 (%)	Change (pct. pt.)
All households	12.1	10.2	-1.9*	4.1	2.7	-1.4*
Medium- and high-income hh.	5.8	5.1	-0.8	1.6	1.0	-0.6*
Low-income	28.1	28.2	0.1	10.1	8.8	-1.3
Low-income hh. not receiving food stamps in prior month	19.6	23.9	4.3*	6.4	6.6	0.2
Aliens	32.2	23.1	-9.1	13.5	5.0	-8.5
Citizens	19.2	23.9	4.7*	6.3	6.7	0.4
Two-parent with children	26.8	28.1	1.3	5.8	2.9	-2.9
Single mother with children	38.0	39.8	1.8	10.3	10.8	0.5
Multi-adult with no children	14.9	18.1	3.2	5.0	4.6	-0.4
Men living alone	20.0	24.8	4.8	11.8	12.0	0.2
Women living alone	10.0	17.1	7.1*	3.8	6.6	2.8

Low-income hh. receiving food stamps in prior month	47.8	45.4	-2.4	18.6	17.5	-1.1
Aliens	NA ^a	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Citizens	48.1	45.5	-2.6	18.5	17.5	-1.0
Two-parent with children	52.0	55.2	3.2	17.1	6.8	-10.3
Single mother with children	51.7	45.1	-6.6	20.5	17.4	-3.1
Multi-adult with no children	47.6	36.9	-10.7	13.0	25.3	12.3
Men living alone	55.5	54.3	-1.2	36.5	29.1	-7.4
Women living alone	36.8	42.8	6.0	14.3	21.7	7.4

NOTE: The nonmetro sample of alien-headed, low-income, food-stamp-recipient households was too small for reliable estimates of food insecurity and hunger prevalences. * = change was significant at 90% confidence level.

^a NA = not applicable.

SOURCE: Calculated by ERS using data from Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, April 1995 and April 1999.

in nonmetro areas than in the nation as a whole, while the reverse was true for women living alone. For multi-adult households without children and for men living alone, increases in food insecurity were similar in nonmetro and metro areas. However, these differences across household types in nonmetro areas may be mainly an artifact of higher sampling variation due to the small nonmetro sample sizes in the CPS.

The change from 1995 to 1999 in the prevalence of hunger among low-income households not receiving food stamps was small and statistically insignificant in nonmetro areas, as it was at the national level. The observed increase among nonmetro households amounted to only 0.4 percentage points for citizen-headed households and to 0.2 percentage points when noncitizens are included. Among nonmetro, citizen-headed households, the largest observed changes were a decline in hunger among two-parent families with children (2.9 percentage points) and an increase in hunger among women living alone (2.8 percentage points). These were not statistically significant, but were large enough to merit further consideration. The corresponding changes at the national level were in the same direction, but were smaller and also not statistically significant. The substantial decline in hunger for single-mother families at the national level was not observed among nonmetro households.

Changes in food insecurity and hunger among nonmetro low-income households that received food stamps were not statistically significant (Table 15.4). The large observed decline for two-parent families with children and increase for multi-adult households without children merit further examination, however.

SUMMARY

Much of the overall decline in the food stamp caseload from 1995 to 1999 resulted from rising income, which lowered the proportion of households eligible for food stamps. However, a substantial part of the caseload decline resulted from decreased food stamp use among low-income households, and much of this decline appears to have resulted from less access to food stamps, rather than less need for food assistance.

Reduced access to food stamps is suggested by the substantial increase in food insecurity among low-income households that did not receive food stamps. At the national level, this pattern was consistent for all household types, with the exception of households headed by non-citizens, for whom the increase in food insecurity was smaller and not statistically significant. In nonmetro areas, the same general pattern of increased food insecurity was observed for citizen-headed, low-income households not receiving food stamps. Increases were less consistent across household types in nonmetro areas, likely due, in part, to the smaller sample sizes. Differences between nonmetro and national changes in food stamp use and food security were not statistically significant, and, in general, there is little evidence of important differences in causes and consequences of declining food stamp caseloads between nonmetro and metro areas. It should be noted, however, that the data and methods used would only register a nonmetro difference if the distinctive characteristic were quite widespread in nonmetro areas.

Changes in the prevalence of hunger among low-income households not receiving food stamps were small overall and inconsistent across household types, generally suggesting that the most needy households were still able to access food stamps. This was especially true for single mothers, among whom the prevalence of hunger declined significantly at the national level.

Food insecurity and hunger increased among low-income women living alone, both nationally and in nonmetro areas. This did not appear to be associated with changes in food stamp participation, however. Food stamp receipt by low-income women living alone declined less sharply than for most other groups, and food insecurity and hunger increased among both food stamp recipients and nonrecipients.

Notes

1. Income information used in the Wilde (2000) study, as well as for the present study, refers to annual income. Food stamp eligibility is based on income during the previous month, and there are asset tests for eligibility as well. This means that some households with annual incomes above 130 percent of the poverty line were eligible for food stamps in some months. Conversely, some households with annual incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line were ineligible because of asset holdings.
2. The design factor is an adjustment that must be applied when calculating sampling

variance based on data from a complex sample such as the CPS, rather than from a simple random sample. The design factors used here are consistent with information provided by the Census Bureau.

3. The proportion of nonmetropolitan households with low income (below 130 percent of the poverty line) was above the national average in both years, consistent with the higher poverty rate registered in nonmetro areas.

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Part 5

Lessons Learned

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