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Increasing the CalFresh Participation Rate in The County of Santa Cruz

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Increasing the CalFresh Participation Rate in
The County of Santa Cruz

by

Juan C Magaña

A Thesis Quality Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Masters Degree
in

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Prof. Frances Edwards. Ph.D.

The Graduate School

San José State University

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I. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp program, is the largest food assistance program in the United States. Its goals are to combat food insecurity, alleviate poverty and promote economic activity and increased tax revenues for the municipalities that administer the program (Ratcliffe, McKernan, & Zhang, 2011; Tiehen, Jolliffe & Smeeding, 2013, and Shimada, 2014). Participation in the program is essential for individuals and families who are struggling to make ends meet and beneficial to the municipalities that administer the program at the local level. To determine the rate of eligible individuals and the number of families who actually participate in the program, the California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) conducts an annual study of SNAP participation within all 58 California counties. The most recent publication of this study notes that only 52.4% of SNAP eligible individuals residing in the County of Santa Cruz are actually participating in the program. When compared to the remaining 57 counties in the state of California, the County of Santa Cruz is currently ranked 47th in the state in terms of SNAP, or CalFresh as it is known in the state, participation (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014).

Based on its low participation rate and ranking, the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department (HSD), the agency responsible for administering the CalFresh program in the County of Santa Cruz, is looking for strategies to increase its CalFresh participation rate. The intent of this study is to conduct a comparison of six counties, and their administering agencies in the state of California, in order to determine what they are doing to increase and/or maintain their CalFresh participation rate, and to see if their

processes can be incorporated into the County of Santa Cruz's efforts to increase its CalFresh participation rate. These administrating agencies are: San Bernardino County's Department of Human Services (DHS); Imperial County's Department of Social Services (DSS); Tulare County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA); San Benito County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA); Santa Clara County's Social Services Agency (SSA); and Monterey County's Department of Social Services (DSS). These agencies are currently ranked 3rd, 4th, 7th, 24th, 38th and 41st, respectively, in terms of their CalFresh participation (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). The three highest-ranking counties, San Bernardino, Imperial and Tulare, will be surveyed to determine what they are doing to maintain their high participation rate. The remaining three counties, San Benito, Santa Clara and Monterey, will be benchmarked against the County of Santa Cruz to determine what strategies they are trying in order to improve their participation rate.

Background

Public welfare, "loosely defined as the use of public tax money to support the poor, can be traced back to ancient times. Aristotle wrote of the Athenian practice of providing a stipend for food to those unable to work due to incapacity" (Dorsch, 2013, p. 202). In the United States, the "Early American welfare systems were based largely on English Poor Laws, which arose in part to address the failures of private charity to support the poor" (Dorsch, 2013, p. 202). Although food assistance in the United States has been in place as early as 1874 (Dorsch, 2013), the origins of SNAP can be traced back to the Great Depression.

Galer-Uni (1995) notes, “The economic depression of the 1930s brought widespread unemployment, poverty, and hunger. During this era of the New Deal many activities traditionally accepted as private pursuits became the responsibility of the federal government” (p. 20). One program that emerged was the surplus commodities program, which distributed much-needed surplus food commodities to the indigent American population. Unfortunately,

Problems with the surplus commodities program began almost immediately. The federal government received complaints of waste (because some families received too much food) and complaints of misuse and fraud (because some families were giving away or selling food)...Furthermore, grocers and retailers were disgruntled because the system of distribution bypassed them and, therefore, they did not benefit economically (Galer-Uni, 1995, p. 21).

As a result, the first food stamp program was enacted in 1939.

According to MacDonald (1977), “The purpose of the first food stamp program was to increase domestic food consumption through regular business channels” (p. 2). This program “had a two-color system of stamps. Persons who met the eligibility criteria...could buy orange stamps, which could be used to buy any food items on a dollar-for-dollar basis” (Ohls and Beebout, 1993, p. 13). The orange stamps also entitled the participants of the food stamp program to receive free blue stamps, one dollar’s worth of blue stamps for every two dollars spent in orange stamps. These blue stamps could in turn be used to purchase specific surplus commodities, as determined on a month-to-month basis by the Secretary of Agriculture (Galer-Uni, 1995; Ohls and Beebout, 1993; and MacDonald, 1977). It is important to note that the first food stamp program did not

operate on a nationwide basis. “At its peak in August 1942, it served about half of the counties in the United States and 88 cities, areas that together contained close to two-thirds of the U.S. population (Ohls and Beebout, 1993, p. 13). By 1943, the demands of World War II reduced agricultural surpluses throughout the country and the first food stamp program ceased to exist (Ohls and Beebout, 1993).

Between 1943 and 1963, a series of bills proposing the establishment of a permanent food stamp program were introduced with no success. In 1964, under the endorsement of President Johnson, the Food Stamp Act of 1964 was signed into law. “The law established the Food Stamp Program as a permanent program designed to ...safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s population and raise levels of nutrition among low income households” (Galer-Unti, 1995, p. 23). Furthermore, “The Act served not only to provide low-income households with financial assistance to buy food, but it also sought to protect farmers and food producers from surplus and falling prices” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 204). The new Food Stamp Program encompassed features of the first food stamp program, the purchasing of food stamps to exchange for food and eliminated the blue stamp component of the earlier program. “Unlike cash grant programs, which provide aid in the form of cash directly to recipients, [the Food Stamp Program] provides aid as in-kind benefits, which are benefits directly linked to specific goods” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 200). Consequently, the enactment of the Food Stamp Act of 1964 “placed the Food Stamp Program on a permanent legislative basis, from which food stamps have grown to their current prominence in the income support system” (Ohls and Beebout, 1993, p. 15).

In its early stages, “The Food Stamp Program operated, for the most part, as was written in the Food Stamp Act of 1964” (Galer-Unit, 1995, p. 23). Major legislation was enacted in the late 1970’s in an attempt to reform the Food Stamp Program. Seen as a barrier to participation in the Food Stamp Program, the requirement to purchase stamps was eliminated with the enactment of the Food Stamp Act of 1977 (United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service ((USDA FNS)), 2013b). Additional administrative changes that occurred throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s were primarily aimed at reducing and eliminating the inefficiencies of the Food Stamp Program (Dorsch, 2013). The enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 brought forth the most significant changes, changes that are reflected in the program that is in place today.

Described by President Clinton as a “plan to ‘end welfare as we know it’” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 205), PRWORA “helped address concerns that government assistance created perverse incentives for recipients” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 204). It created “reforms that placed limits on the amount of time that recipients could receive benefits without employment. The reforms also promoted work through incentives rather than through sanctions by encouraging states to improve access for low-wage workers” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 204-205).

Most importantly, “PRWORA...required all states to move to Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) systems by October 1, 2002, thereby eliminating all paper “food stamps”” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 205). The EBT system is an electronic system that allows Food Stamp recipients, as well as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and some Women’s, Infants and Children (WIC) recipients, to use a debit-like card to

authorize the transfer of their benefits to an authorized retail merchant (USDA FNS, 2013b). The cards “are designed to look and operate in much the same way as a regular debit card, which has given recipients a greater sense of privacy and removed some of the stigma associated with the easily identifiable paper food stamps” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 205). The advantages of the establishment of the EBT system are improved “recipient access to benefits, since the electronic delivery largely avoids the possibility of mail theft, slow mail, and long lines to pick up benefits” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 205).

The most recent changes to the Food Stamp Program came as the result of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. The Act renamed the Food Stamp Program as the “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,” or SNAP, to reflect the modern program where benefits are issued electronically as opposed to benefits issued as paper stamps. The name change also better reflect[ed] the program’s focus on providing eligible households with the opportunity to obtain a more nutritious diet through the allotment of federal food assistance (Dorsch, 2013, p. 205).

In the same year, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the administering agency for SNAP in the state of California, also sought to revamp the Food Stamp name. In November of 2010 the state of California replaced the name Food Stamps with CalFresh in an attempt to reflect the state’s efforts to promote healthy eating habits for all Californians (CDSS, 2010).

The current program has evolved considerably since its enactment in 1964. Participants in the program are no longer limited to using CalFresh benefits at “select”

retail merchants. In an attempt to increase access to fresh and healthy foods, California has expanded and promoted the usage of CalFresh to local Farmer’s Markets.

CalFresh/SNAP Eligibility

In order to receive CalFresh/SNAP benefits, individuals and/or families must meet two eligibility tests. First, the total monthly gross income for the family or individual must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. In 2015, 130 percent of federal poverty for a single individual is \$1265/month; for a family of four, 130 percent of federal poverty is \$2584/month. Second, the net income must be at or below the federal poverty limit for the individual or family size (Tiehen, Jollife & Gundersen, 2012).

Table 1: SNAP Income eligibility guidelines.

Household Size	Gross monthly income (130 percent of poverty)	Net monthly income (100 percent of poverty)
1	\$1,265	\$ 973
2	1,705	1,311
3	2,144	1,650
4	2,584	1,988
5	3,024	2,326
6	3,464	2,665
7	3,904	3,003
8	4,344	3,341
Each additional member	+440	+339

Source: USDA FNS, 2014.

The “Net income is calculated by subtracting a standard deduction from a household’s gross income. In addition to this standard deduction, households with labor earnings deduct 20% of those earnings from their gross income. Deductions are also taken for childcare and/or care for disabled dependents, medical expenses, and excessive shelter expenses” (Gundersen, Kreider & Pepper, 2011). Table 1 above notes the Gross and Net Income limits for various household sizes. It is important to note that a third eligibility test, an asset test, is no longer in effect in states that have enacted Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE). As noted by the USDA FNS, BBCE removes the limit on resources and increases the gross income limit (2013a).

Upon passing both the gross and net income tests, the SNAP benefit formula is applied to the net countable income in order to determine the monthly benefit amount. As Tiehen et al. (2012) note, “The SNAP benefit formula is a function of the maximum SNAP benefit amount (also known as the benefit guarantee) and the household’s net income” (p. 2). The SNAP benefit amount is computed based on the SNAP benefit reduction rate of 30 percent. Consequently, “benefits are reduced by 30 cents for each additional dollar in household net income... therefore, the poorest SNAP households receive the largest benefits” (Tiehen et al., 2012, p. 2). “The SNAP maximum benefit level is intended to cover the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet for a given household size” (as cited in Tiehen et al, 2013, p. 15). Table 2 below notes the current maximum benefit amounts for various household sizes.

Table 2: Maximum SNAP Benefit Amount.

People in Household	Maximum Monthly Allotment
1	\$ 194
2	\$ 357
3	\$ 511
4	\$ 649
5	\$ 771
6	\$ 925
7	\$ 1,022
8	\$ 1,169
Each additional person	\$ 146

Source: USDA FNS, 2014.

Challenges to Participation

The need to increase participation in the CalFresh program is not a new concept. In California, each of the state’s 58 county agencies administers the CalFresh program. Along with CDSS, counties have “strived...to increase participation rates for CalFresh through outreach and other efforts” (CDSS, 2013b, p.2). Their goal is to enroll as many participants as possible, as the use of CalFresh benefits bring forth positive results to both participants and the local economy. For the participant, the amount of CalFresh benefits received per month allows him to have additional funds available for non-food related expenses. For the local economy, the use of CalFresh benefits the community by bringing valuable dollars into the local economy. Unfortunately, “California’s lower than average

participation negatively impacts both potential eligible participants and [the] economy” (CDSS, 2013b, p. 2).

Some of the known challenges to increasing participation in the CalFresh program include a “lack of knowledge regarding who is eligible for the program, frustration with the application process, the stigma associated with the program, and misconceptions in immigrant communities” (CDSS, 2013b, p. 2). Additionally, a major contributing factor to the low participation rate in various California counties is “churning.” Churning occurs “when eligible clients do not complete the renewal process or other requirements for various reasons, but then they quickly re-enroll, typically within 90 days” (CDSS, 2013b, p. 3). As Shimada (2014) notes, “The “churning” of participants results in expensive inefficiencies for the state and a gap in benefits for clients in need of nutrition assistance” (p. 5).

As a result of these challenges, counties throughout the state are making diligent efforts to combat these challenges to participation. Unfortunately for some counties, such as the County of Santa Cruz, their efforts have been undermined by a combination of internal and external factors that have ultimately contributed to its low CalFresh participation rate and therefore, its low ranking.

II. Literature Review

When looking for studies that address how to increase participation in public welfare/social betterment programs, the resulting queries produced little to no useful information. Queries were conducted via social work, social sciences, sociology and public administration databases as well as via Google Scholar. Some of the key words used in these queries included: CalFresh, SNAP, Food Stamps, public assistance, welfare, increase, expand and participation. Unfortunately, the results of the research found no prior studies that address the methods that can be used to increase the participation rate in public assistance programs. Most of the studies instead documented the benefits to participation in public assistance programs throughout the United States. As a result the information noted in this Literature Review depicts the reasons why the County of Santa Cruz, as well as other CalFresh/SNAP administering agencies, should make an effort to increase its program participation rate. It is important to note that in this section, and subsequent sections, the terms CalFresh and SNAP appear in the literature interchangeably as they are the same program in California.

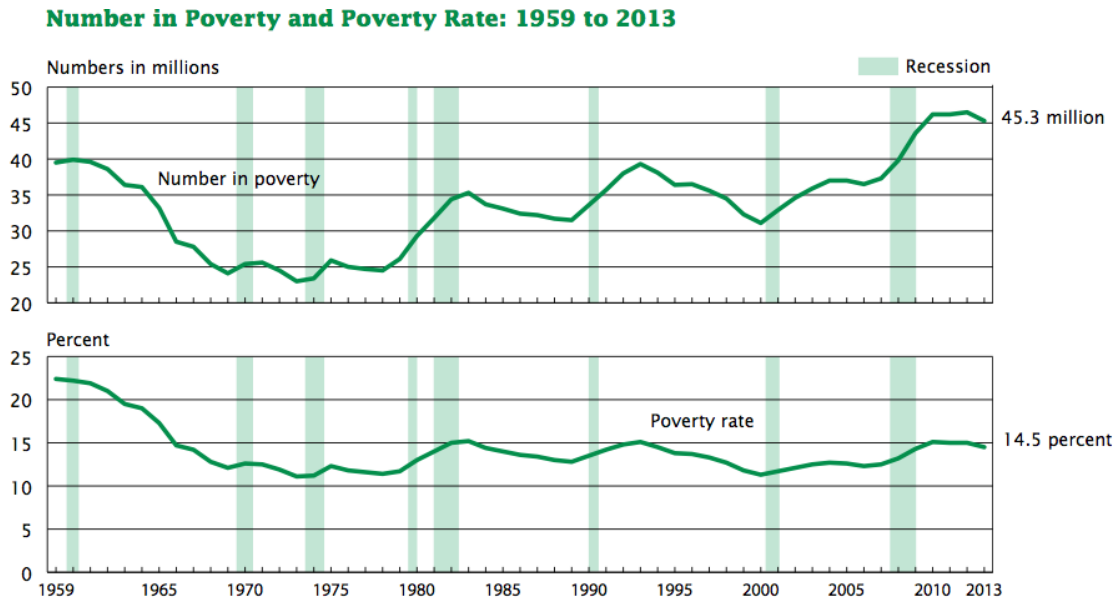
The legislative intent of SNAP is to reduce poverty, decrease food insecurity and promote economic activity within the United States (Mykerezi and Mills, 2010; Tiehen, Jolliffe et al., 2013; Dorsch, 2013). Various entities, both public and private, have taken on the challenge of conducting studies in order to determine if the program is meeting its intended goals. In the public sector, legislation such as the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires public administrators to assess the efficacy of government programs (Cunnyngham, 2011). In addition, administrative agencies such as the Office of Management and Budget have made a case that “Rigorous, independent program

evaluations can be a key resource in determining whether Government programs are achieving their intended outcomes” (Nord and Prell, 2011, p. 2). As a result, organizations and individuals have sought - and continue to seek - to determine if participation in SNAP has in fact reduced poverty, decreased food insecurity and promoted economic activity in today’s society.

Reduction of Poverty

When President Johnson signed the Food Stamp Act of 1964, he stated that “as a permanent program, the food stamp plan [would] be one of our most valuable weapons for the war on poverty” (Tiehen et al., 2013, p. 1). Tiehen, et al., (2012) note, “The official U.S. poverty measure is based on a comparison of a family’s income relative to its needs. The income measure includes all pre-tax income, such as earnings, unemployment compensation, and Social Security payments. It also includes cash benefits from means-tested transfer programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)” (p. 6). Bear in mind that the family income does not include any non-cash benefits such as SNAP benefits, housing assistance, or Medicaid (Tiehen et al., 2012). Once the family income has been computed it is compared against the federal poverty threshold. For 2015, the federal poverty threshold for a family of four is \$2020/month or \$24,250/year (HealthCare.Gov, 2015). “If [the] family income is less than the poverty threshold, then all members of the family are considered poor.” (Tiehen et al., 2012, p. 6). In 2013, 45.3 million people in the United States lived below the federal poverty line (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor, 2014).

Figure 1: Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate: 1959 to 2013.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2013.

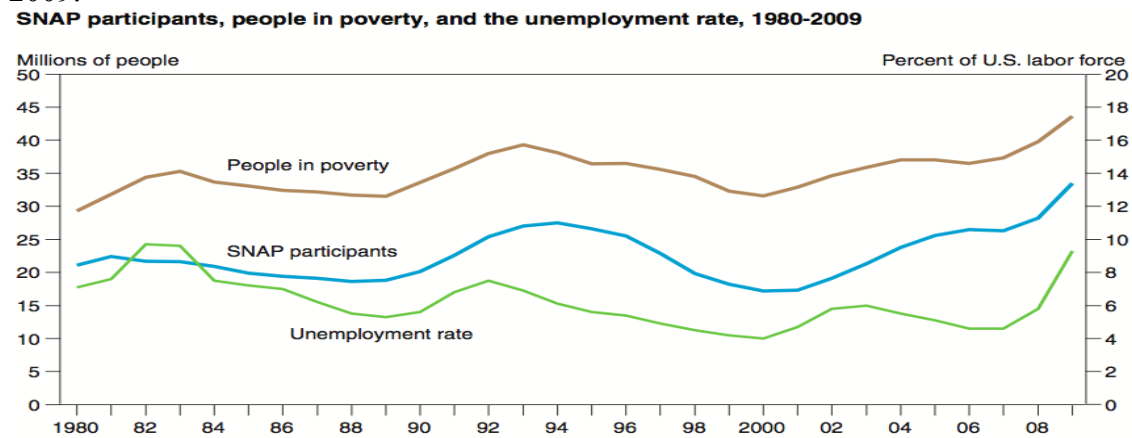
As Figure 1 above indicates, the number of people living in poverty in the United States tends to increase during periods of economic downturn. In contrast, the percentage of individuals living in poverty, also known as the poverty rate, has remained relatively steady, between ten and fifteen percent, since shortly after the establishment of SNAP.

Given the fact that “SNAP benefits are not included in the family income measure for official U.S. poverty estimation, the program’s role in reducing poverty is not reflected in official poverty statistics” (Tiehen et al., 2013, p. 8). Based on the fact that safety net services such as SNAP play an integral role in alleviating poverty, the United States Census Bureau publishes an annual Supplemental Measure of Poverty (SMP). The SMP “is designed to account for government expenditures that improve the well-being of low-income families, and has been used to calculate the number of individuals lifted above the poverty line by SNAP benefits” (Tiehen et al., 2012, p. 1). In 2011, “the

official poverty rate was 15.0 percent, while accounting for SNAP benefits in family income reduced the poverty rate to 13.8 percent. This...reduction in the poverty rate means that SNAP lifted approximately 3.7 million people out of poverty in 2011” (Tiehen et al., 2013, p. 8). In 2013, the SMP calculated that 4.8 million Americans were kept out of poverty based on their receipt of SNAP benefits (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

Tiehen et al. (2012) wrote, “An important measure of SNAP’s effectiveness is the extent to which the program reduces poverty” (p. iii). The economic recession of 2008 resulted in an increased need for social welfare services throughout the nation. According to Danielson and Klerman (2011), “When the economy worsens, more households become eligible for food stamps or for a larger amount of assistance” (p. 11). Figure 2 below depicts how the number of people in poverty, SNAP participants and the unemployment rate all tend to mirror each other throughout the various stages of the United States’ economic cycles.

Figure 2: SNAP participant, People in Poverty, and The Unemployment Rate, 1980-2009.



Source: Tiehen et al., 2012, p. 3.

Consequent to the recession, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 was passed and provided much needed stimulus to the national and local economy. ARRA created many positive changes to the federal food assistance program, such as increasing the maximum benefit allotment by 13.6 percent per household size and expanded eligibility to single individuals without children (Nord and Prell, 2011). Table 3 reflects the pre and post-ARRA increase in the maximum monthly SNAP benefit.

**Table 3: Maximum SNAP Benefits, pre and post AARRA.
Maximum monthly SNAP benefits pre-ARRA and post-ARRA¹**

Number of people in the SNAP unit ²	Maximum monthly SNAP benefits		
	Pre-ARRA in fiscal 2009 (October 1, 2008– March 31, 2009)	Post-ARRA (beginning April 1, 2009)	ARRA increase in maximum monthly SNAP benefits
	Dollars		
1	176	200	24
2	323	367	44
3	463	526	63
4	588	668	80
5	698	793	95
6	838	952	114
7	926	1,052	126
8	1,058	1,202	144

Source: Nord and Prell, 2011, p. 2

As a result, “The antipoverty effect of SNAP was highest in 2009, when the ARRA increased SNAP benefits to all participants, and SNAP benefits ensured that the depth and severity of poverty increased only slightly from their 2008 levels despite worsening economic conditions” (Tiehen et al., 2012, p. 19).

Furthermore, in their 2012 study, Tiehen et al., “found an average decline of 4.4 percent in the prevalence of poverty due to SNAP benefits, while the average decline in

the depth and severity of poverty was 10.3 and 13.2 percent, respectively” (p. i).

Additionally, their analysis of the effect of SNAP on poverty showed that the receipt of SNAP benefits played “an important role in improving the welfare of individuals in low-income households” (Tiehen et al., 2012, p. 19). It is evident that the receipt of SNAP benefits during times of economic woes “are proof positive that the program functions as it was designed: as a social safety net to guard against poverty and hardship” (Dorsch, 2013, p. 201).

Given the fact that 22.1 percent of the County of Santa Cruz’s residents are living in poverty, an amount equal to the percentage of Californians living in poverty (Wimer, Mattingly, Levin, Danielson & Bohn, 2013), the importance of increasing its CalFresh participation rate cannot be overlooked. Another benefit of SNAP is reducing food insecurity.

Decreasing Food Insecurity

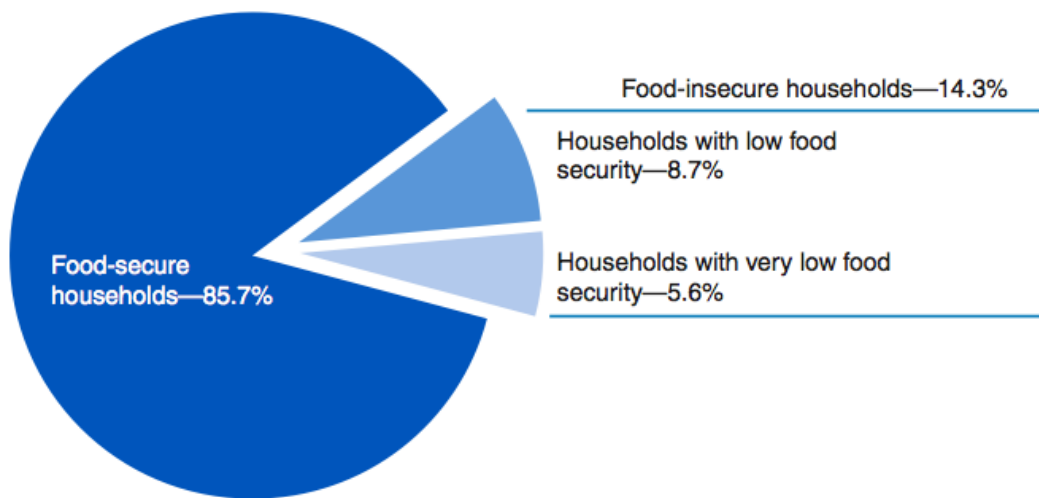
“The United States has one of the highest standards of living in the world, yet nearly 15% of all U.S. households and 40% if its near-poor households (below 130% of the poverty threshold) were food insecure in 2009” (as cited in Ratcliffe et al., 2011, p. 1083). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (1999), “The alleviation of food insecurity is a central goal of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 281). Food insecurity is defined as the inability of people to access enough food, at all times, for an active, healthy life (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory & Singh, 2014). In 2013, 14.3 percent of American households “were food insecure at least some time during the year, including 5.6 percent with very low food security, meaning that the food intake of one or more household members was reduced

and their eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year because the household lacked money and other resources for food” (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014, abstract).

Figure 3 below demonstrates the percentages of households in the United States that are considered food secure as well as those that are considered having low food security and very low food security.

Figure 3: U.S. Households by food security status, 2013.

U.S. households by food security status, 2013



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2013 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Source: Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014, p. 6.

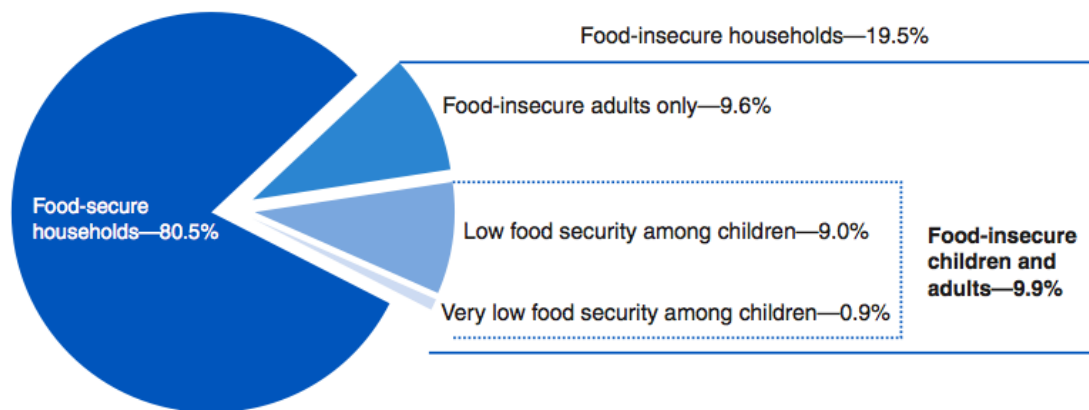
Consequently, “food insecurity is one of the most important nutrition-related public health issues in the U.S.” (Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 281).

Food insecurity in the United States is measured by gathering information from the Current Population Survey-Food Security Survey (CPS-FSS) conducted annually during the month of December. Appendix B shows the 18-question survey used to determine food insecurity. “The CPS currently includes about 54,000 households and is representative, at State and national levels, of the civilian, non-institutionalized population of the United States” (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014, p. 2).

“Households responding affirmatively to two or fewer questions are classified as food secure, those responding affirmatively to three to seven questions are classified as low food secure (three to five questions for households without children), and those responding affirmatively to eight or more questions are classified as very low food secure (six or more for households without children)” (Gundersen, et al., 2011, p. 283). In order to account for child food insecurity, the CPS-FSS has “eight child-specific questions ... Under this set [of questions], a household is said to be “child food insecure” if two or more questions are answered affirmatively and “very low child food secure” if five or more questions are answered affirmatively” (Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 284). Figure 4 demonstrates the fact that in 2013, 80.5 percent of households in the United States were food secure; 9.9 percent of U.S. households with children were classified as either low food secure or very low food secure.

Figure 4: Food Security: U.S. Households with children, 2013.

U.S. households with children by food security status of adults and children, 2013



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2013 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

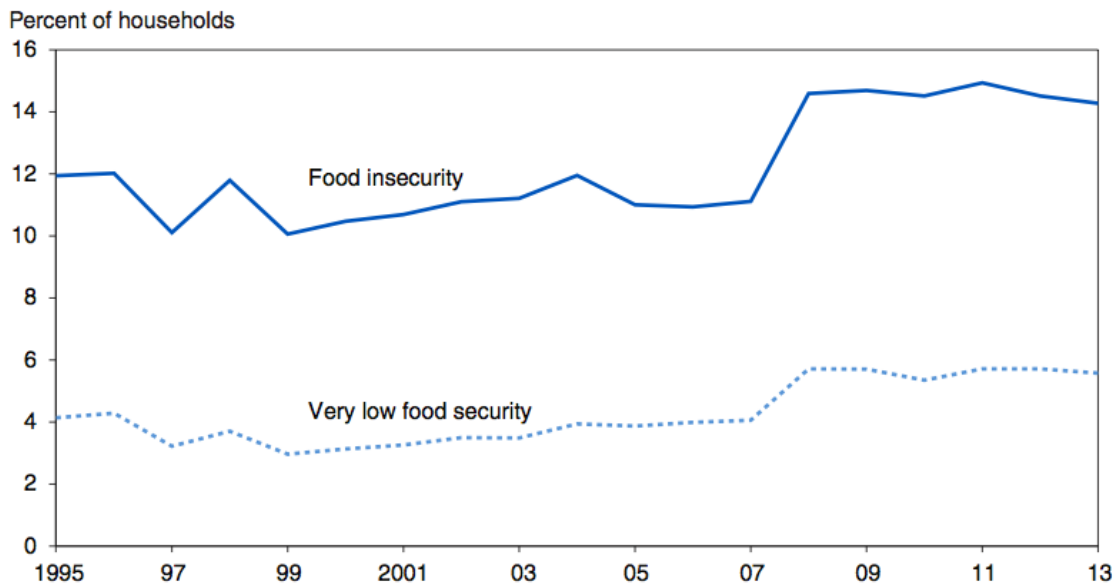
Source: Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014, p. 8.

In their 2011 study, Gunderson et al., point out that “From 2001 to 2007, the food

insecurity rate remained relatively steady at about 12%, with very low food security rates ranging from 3-4%. These rates increased dramatically in 2008. For the food insecurity category, there was an almost 35% increase (from 12.2% to 16.4%), and for the very low food security category, rates rose by almost 50% (from 4.0% to 5.8%)” (Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 285). Figure 5 shows the steady food insecurity rate from 2001 – 2007. The dramatic increase in food insecurity that began in 2008 can only be attributed to the economic recession that occurred within that same year.

Figure 5: Trends Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Insecurity in US Households, 1995 – 2013.

Trends in the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in U.S. households, 1995-2013¹



Source: Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014, p. 12.

For individuals and households that deal with food insecurity on a day-to-day basis, their ability to meet their food needs is severely impaired by their socio-economic status.

Some participate in one or more of the Federal food and nutrition assistance programs or obtain food from emergency food providers in their communities to supplement the food they purchase. Households that turn to Federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs typically do so because they are having difficulty in meeting their food needs (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014, p. 26).

The receipt of SNAP benefits provides the recipients of these benefits with the ability to purchase food. As previously discussed, “Eligibility is a prerequisite for participation in any means-tested program. In some cases, family members can change their behavior to meet eligibility requirements (e.g., reduce earnings below the required threshold), while in other cases this is not possible (e.g., become a nonimmigrant to avoid eligibility restrictions on immigrants)” (Ratcliffe et al., 2011, p. 1085). Unfortunately, “Despite the potentially large benefit levels, a large fraction of households eligible for SNAP do not participate” (Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 292).

The reasons why individuals and households elect not to participate in SNAP vary from person to person. For those that do wish to participate in SNAP, the receipt of SNAP benefits has been found to significantly reduce the likelihood of food insecurity (Ratcliffe et al., 2011). According to Coleman-Jensen et al. (2014), in 2013, sixty-two percent of all food-insecure households received SNAP benefits. Studies have documented the effect that SNAP has on reducing food insecurity in the United States. In their study, Mykerezzi and Mills (2010) found that participation in SNAP lowers food insecurity by at least 18 percent. Ratcliffe et al. (2011) have also documented the fact “that SNAP has a substantial effect on households’ food insecurity and is achieving what

the program was designed to do—reduce food-related hardship” (Ratcliffe et al., 2011, p. 1091). In addition, Ratcliffe et al. (2011) concluded that, “The receipt of SNAP benefits is found to reduce the likelihood of food insecurity by 16.2 percentage points” (p. 1091).

In 2010, 37.1 percent of adults residing in the County of Santa Cruz were food insecure (CFPA, 2010), reinforcing the need to increase participation in the CalFresh program throughout the county to lower this percentage. Furthermore, increasing CalFresh participation can also promote economic activity in the administering municipality.

Promoting Economic Activity

“Despite the general economic recovery and California’s state budget surplus, millions of Californians struggle to make ends meet. For instance, at least four million low-income adults in California cannot consistently afford enough food” (Shimada, 2014, p. 1). The use of CalFresh benefits allows “households to redistribute income that would normally be allocated to purchasing food” (Shimada, 2014, p. 2) to some other beneficial use. This can ultimately lead to an increase in economic activity throughout the state, as the “USDA has shown that every dollar in SNAP expenditures generates \$1.79 in economic activity” (Shimada, 2014, p.2). Most importantly, the income not used to purchase food, due to receipt of CalFresh benefits, can be used to purchase taxable goods which can produce valuable tax revenue for both the state and local counties (Shimada, 2014). In short, “Underutilization of CalFresh means less for all Californians – less nutrition assistance for eligible households, less economic activity, and less sales tax revenue for the state and local governments” (Shimada, 2014, p. 2).

If CalFresh participation were to reach 100 percent of all eligible individuals “California would receive an estimated \$3.5 billion in additional federal nutrition benefits each year. Those benefits would generate an estimated \$6.3 billion in additional economic activity per year” (Shimada, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, “CFPA calculates that these dollars would result in an estimated \$62 million of additional sales tax revenue for the state general fund (GF). Similarly, CalFresh participation among all eligible individuals would generate an estimated \$29 million for county budgets through additional state and county sales tax” (Shimada, 2014, p. 3).

For the County of Santa Cruz, achieving 100 percent CalFresh participation would equate to an estimated increase in economic activity of \$41,359,788. From this increase in economic activity, the County of Santa Cruz would receive \$181,960 in annual sales tax revenue (Shimada, 2014). These figures demonstrate the County of Santa Cruz’s need to increase participation in the CalFresh program within the county.

Current Efforts to Increase Participation

In order to increase participation in the CalFresh program throughout the state, CDSS has instructed counties to develop plans for increasing their CalFresh participation rate (CDSS, 2013b). Of the county plans submitted to CDSS to increase CalFresh participation, churning was reported to be a major contributing factor to their overall participation rate (CDSS, 2013b). Some of the proposed plans reported to CDSS to reduce churning and increase their CalFresh participation included conducting studies to determine the reasons for their high churn rates and contacting clients by phone prior to discontinuing their benefits (CDSS, 2013b).

Of the seven counties mentioned in this study, six submitted plans to increase

participation in the CalFresh program. San Bernardino County plans to identify major reasons for discontinuances, use pre-populated forms at the annual redetermination and use text messaging to contact customers to inform them of case closures and missing forms (CDSS, 2013b). Imperial County plans on having staff make reminder phone calls to customers due for their annual recertification (CDSS, 2013b). “Tulare County is trying to reduce churn by actively investigating CalFresh recipient cases that are set to discontinue or are on hold for [the] future month” (CDSS, 2013b, p. 8). Santa Clara County noted that in order “to reduce churn[ing they would be] making more outbound automated calls to remind clients of their certification appointment, identifying major cause[s] for discontinuance of benefits, and creating a plan to try to avoid or reduce discontinuance rates” (CDSS, 2013b, p. 7-8). Monterey County is planning on using telephone interviews at redeterminations, implement customer self-service options and provide reminders to customers in order to reduce churning (CDSS, 2013b). Lastly, it is the goal of the County of Santa Cruz to

minimize the number of CalFresh cases that are discontinued each month by reminding [clients] through phone calls and text alerts. Also, staff will try to develop new protocol that will reduce churn by addressing unintended case closures like when [a] client has moved [to a new address] and [has] not received a required report or recertification form to complete. 1/6 of cases are closed every month mostly because reports or recertification forms were not submitted or completed correctly (CDSS, 2013b, p. 8).

The results of these efforts are yet to be seen as counties who submitted proposals to CDSS are in the last year of a three-year plan to increase participation in the CalFresh

program.

One more way counties throughout the state are attempting to increase their CalFresh participation rate is by focusing on “in-reach” within their departments. “In-reach is a tool to better inform, connect, and enroll households using other public benefit programs into CalFresh” (CFPA, 2012, p. 2). If used effectively, “Data sharing between CalFresh and other programs could reduce redundancy in the application for multiple benefits, and ensure that low-income households can easily access an array of benefits” (CFPA, 2012, p.2). Focusing on “in-reach” to current recipients of social services within the County of Santa Cruz has the potential of increasing the CalFresh participation rate with minimal impact to administrative work, as these potential participants already have an established case with the county’s Human Services Department.

III. Methodology

Participation in the CalFresh program has been proven to reduce poverty, decrease food insecurity and boost economic activity. As a result, CDSS has brought forth various policy changes and strategies to increase the CalFresh participation rate throughout the state. Some of the state’s efforts are listed in Table 4 below. Legislative changes such as the establishment of Semi-Annual Reporting and the elimination of the face-to-face interview requirement are mandatory for all counties. On the contrary, the elimination of some of the barriers to participation, such as the establishment of Case Management System and the use of Telephonic Signatures, are voluntary and dependent on the administrative agency’s ability to fully fund these changes.

Table 4: State Efforts to Increase CalFresh Participation

State Efforts to Increase CalFresh Participation	
Legislative Changes	Elimination of Barriers
Establishment of Semi-Annual Reporting (previously Quarterly Reporting)	Case Management Systems (allows customers to have on-line access to update information and check benefit status)
Elimination of Finger Print Requirement (previously required for all adults)	Application Assistance Portals (for Community Based Organizations to assist customers)
Elimination of Face-to-Face Interview requirement	Telephonic Signatures on Applications (reduces the amount of paperwork that a customer needs to submit)

Source: CDSS, 2013a.

At the county level, administrative agencies throughout the state are looking at ways to increase participation in CalFresh. As previously noted, CDSS requested that counties provide a plan to increase their CalFresh participation rate. Table 5 depicts the proposed plans by the counties noted in this study. Of the plans submitted, most county plans include addressing churn as a way to increase or maintain their CalFresh

participation. Other plans include the use of technology to streamline the application process and therefore remove some of the barriers to participation.

Table 5: County Efforts to Increase CalFresh Participation

County Efforts to Increase CalFresh Participation	
San Bernardino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified major reasons for discontinuances • Pre-populated redetermination forms • Use text messaging to contact customers
Imperial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make reminder phone calls to customers who are due for their annual redetermination
Tulare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively investigate cases that are set to close in order to reduce churn
San Benito	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No plan reported to CDSS
Santa Clara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of outbound calls to remind customers of appointments • Identify and develop a plan to avoid or reduce discontinuances
Monterey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use telephone interviews • Implement customer self-service options • Provide reminders to help reduce churn
Santa Cruz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use automated phone calls and text messages to remind customers of missing reports • Develop protocol to address unintended closures

Source: CDSS, 2013b.

As previously noted, the intent of this study is to conduct a comparison of six counties, and their administering agencies in the state of California, in order to determine what they are doing to increase and/or maintain their CalFresh participation rate, and to see if their processes can be incorporated into the County of Santa Cruz’s efforts to increase its CalFresh participation rate. The counties chosen for this study were selected based on various factors. The first was their current participation rate and ranking as noted by the CFPA. Appendix B lists all of the counties in the state of California, ranked from one to fifty-eight in terms of their CalFresh participation rate. The counties selected for their high participation rate, San Bernardino, Imperial and Tulare, were based on the fact that agriculture plays a major role in their economy, just like the County of Santa

Cruz. Of the counties benchmarked against the County of Santa Cruz, San Benito, Santa Clara and Monterey, all were selected based on their struggle to increase their participation. San Benito and Monterey were also selected for their heavily agriculture-based economy, as well as their similar geographical characteristics to the County of Santa Cruz. Santa Clara County was selected due to its close proximity to Santa Cruz and most importantly, its close relations with the County of Santa Cruz.

Data regarding what each county is doing to achieve its CalFresh participation rate was acquired via a direct response survey. Participation in this survey was requested via e-mail to the individual(s) responsible for administering the CalFresh program at the six counties noted earlier. These individuals included program supervisors, analysts and managers that have first-hand experience with their county's efforts to increase and/or maintain its CalFresh participation rate. The number of surveys distributed was dependent on the number of positive responses received from the initial request to conduct a survey. Given the small scale of this study, a 100% response rate was needed in order to properly analyze and determine possible recommendations to the County of Santa Cruz. Upon receipt of the completed surveys, a preliminary review of the responses was done, and if needed, follow-up questions were asked via a telephone conversation.

Ten questions were developed in order to obtain the information needed to identify what each county is doing to increase and/or maintain its CalFresh participation rate. For the three counties with the higher participation rates, San Bernardino, Imperial and Tulare, the survey questions were amended to inquire about the county's ability to maintain their high participation rate. For those counties that are struggling to attain more participation, San Benito, Santa Clara and Monterey, the survey questions were amended

to inquire about the county’s efforts to increase its participation rate. The questions (see Appendix C) were structured in such way that the individuals being surveyed were able to experience the natural progression of questions. Most importantly, the responses to these questions will lead to a better understanding of what each county is doing to increase and/or maintain its CalFresh participation rate. Below is a breakdown of the grouping of questions and their intended purpose for this project:

Table 6: CalFresh Participation Survey Breakdown

Grouping	Purpose
Questions 1 - 2	Introductory, to identify the respondents’ level of expertise and involvement in the program
Questions 3 – 5	Identify what each county is doing to increase/maintain its participation rate
Questions 6 –9	Identify challenges to increasing/maintaining its participation rate
Question 10	Identify what the County of Santa Cruz can do to increase its participation rate

Upon completion of these surveys, the information received was analyzed and compared to see what the higher-ranking counties were doing and what the benchmarked counties were trying to do. Based on the findings of these interviews, there were two possible outcomes. First, the findings of these interviews could have revealed that these counties have in place practices that do not exist in the County of Santa Cruz. Recommendations could be developed based on these findings to increase the CalFresh participation rate in the County of Santa Cruz. This in turn will allow the administrators of the CalFresh program in the County of Santa Cruz to incorporate the smart practices of each county into the current practices of the department. If successful, the County of Santa Cruz will be able to increase its CalFresh participation rate.

The second possible outcome of these interviews was that the findings might show that the counties being studied and the County of Santa Cruz had similar practices in place and were taking the same actions to increase participation. This, unfortunately, would not provide the answers sought by the administrative officers of the County of Santa Cruz HSD.

IV. Findings

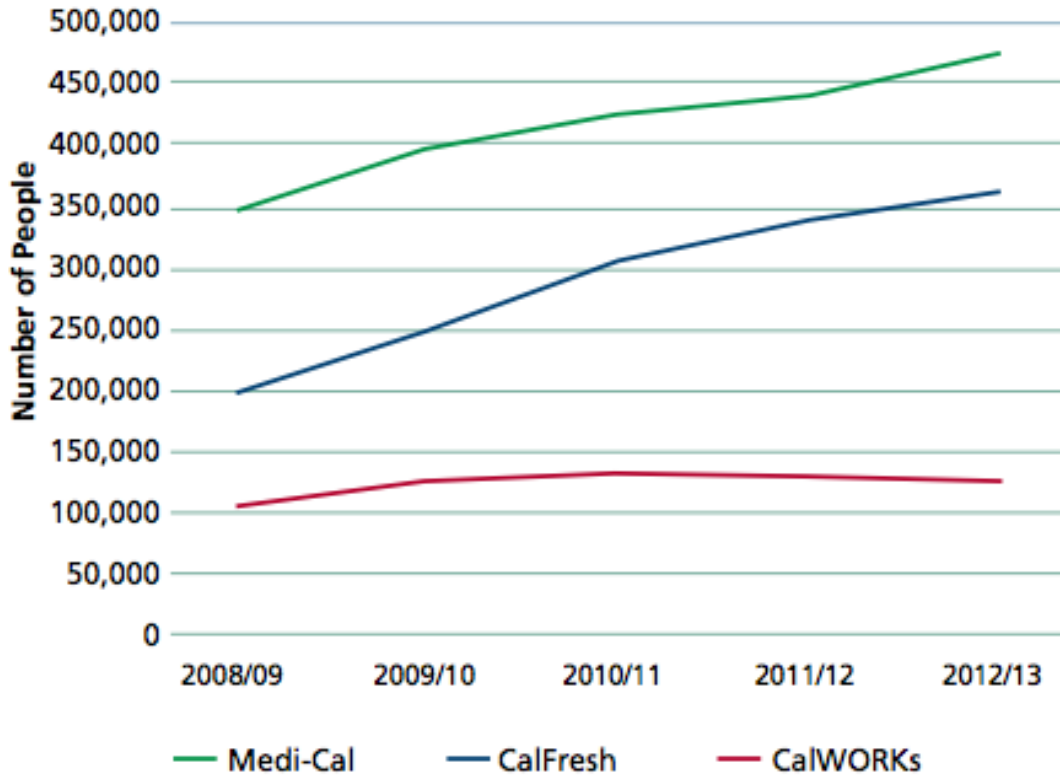
San Bernardino County

Neighboring the states of Arizona and Nevada, and surrounded by Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside Counties, San Bernardino County covers more than twenty thousand square miles of land making it the largest county in the contiguous United States. San Bernardino County is unique among other counties in the state as over 80 percent of its land is undeveloped (Community Foundation, 2014). Home to approximately 2.1 million people, San Bernardino County is the fifth most populated county in the state. The county's racial make up is 51.1 percent Hispanic/Latino, 31.4 percent White, 9.5 percent Black or African American, 7.1 percent Asian and 2 percent American Indian or Alaska Native. (Community Foundation, 2014 & US Census Bureau, 2015). The county also has a median annual household income of \$54,090 and an unemployment rate of 6.7 percent, just below the state average unemployment rate of 6.8 percent (US Census Bureau, 2015 & Employment Development Department (EDD), 2015).

The Transitional Assistance Department (TAD), a subset of the Department of Human Services, is responsible for administering public assistance programs, including CalFresh, for eligible residents in San Bernardino County. In order to serve the needs of its community, TAD has offices in twenty-one different locations within the county and over three thousand employees (San Bernardino County, 2015). "San Bernardino County is home to 4.8% of California's households; however, a disproportionate 7.4% of the 1.28 million California households receiving cash public assistance or CalFresh reside in San Bernardino County" (Community Foundation, 2014, p. 53). As Figure 6 below notes, San

Bernardino County’s CalFresh participation has continuously risen since the commencement of the economic crisis of 2008.

Figure 6: Enrollment in Major Public Assistance Programs – San Bernardino County, 2009 – 2013.



Source: Community Foundation, 2014, p. 53.

In 2013, the number of people participating in the CalFresh program totaled 373,620; in 2014, the number of participants increased to 392,265; this equates to a 5 percent increase in program participation (CDSS, 2015). As evident by these numbers, the need for CalFresh benefits continues to rise and therefore San Bernardino County’s main focus is to maintain its current ranking of 3rd in the state in terms of its CalFresh participation rate.

There are five factors that can be credited to San Bernardino County’s higher CalFresh participation rate: use of technology, marketing, outreach, in-reach and

enhanced customer service (San Bernardino County, 2015). Technology has played a major role in the department's ability to meet the needs of San Bernardino County residents. TAD actively markets and promotes the use of their application website C4Yourself.com. The website is user friendly and allows for applications to be submitted in real time. Additionally, a mobile version has been developed for customers who have access to smartphones. As a result, about 50 percent of applications for benefits are received via the C4Yourself website (San Bernardino County, 2015). Marketing is primarily used to inform the public of the many services it offers. To this end, TAD works extensively with its community partners and other county departments to market its services to the public. Social media and networking are used to distribute information and dispel some of the myths that may inhibit a person's likelihood of applying for benefits. Additionally San Bernardino County's higher CalFresh participation rate has been credited to the use of TAD's website and Facebook page to offer program details, and information on how and where to apply for CalFresh benefits (San Bernardino County, 2015).

TAD works collaboratively with non-profit agencies and community based organizations (CBOs) to promote outreach and program access throughout San Bernardino County. Outreach efforts in place at TAD include the engagement of non-profits in the education and enrollment process for CalFresh benefits. Furthermore, CBOs are able to create a user account with the county's application system that allows them to submit applications for benefits on behalf of a customer. This service has been proven to be especially beneficial for those customers with little to no computer skills or Internet access (San Bernardino County, 2015).

In-reach efforts in place at TAD take place in the way the department promotes program integration. Program integration is a process by which each customer is screened for all programs that they may be eligible for, in addition to just the program being applied for (San Bernardino County, 2015). An unfortunate truth is that many individuals and/or families that apply for one program are not aware of other programs and services offered at TAD. As a result, by promoting program integration, TAD is able to ensure that their customers know about all of the programs for which they are potentially eligible, thereby increasing the likelihood of customers applying for and receiving additional programs and services. Moreover, by promoting program integration TAD is able to streamline the application process and reduce the need for its customers to submit multiple applications for services at different times (San Bernardino County, 2015).

The last factor that has influenced San Bernardino County's higher CalFresh participation rate is its enhanced customer service. TAD has enhanced its customer service by providing self-service kiosks and wireless bar code readers that allow customers to complete a variety of transactions without having to speak to a TAD representative. Most importantly, TAD has placed eligibility staff at each of their twenty-one locations in order to be able to meet the needs of its customers at first point of contact. TAD has switched from the traditional approach to eligibility work, where a customer's benefits are managed by a specified worker, to a task-based model, called Process Approach to Case Excellence (PACE). In the PACE system, case actions are completed by eligibility workers based on the task requiring action. While some workers may be assigned to process reports, others may be assigned to conduct interviews to determine eligibility for benefits. TAD has also established Customer Service Centers

that customers can contact in order to obtain information on their case or assistance with their benefits. As a result, PACE ensures that customers are able to speak to a TAD representative at any time during normal business hours (San Bernardino County, 2015).

As noted earlier, San Bernardino County's main goal is to maintain its CalFresh participation rate. Some of the barriers to maintaining its CalFresh participation rate have been identified as:

- Lack of public information regarding eligibility requirements for CalFresh.
- The potential stigma of applying for and receiving CalFresh.
- Complex program regulations.
- Data sharing restrictions with other federal/state programs that prevent identification and outreach to underserved populations.
- Outdated renewal process: counties are still sending paper forms to households. Renewal[s] should be streamlined for efficiencies, making customer access and retention easier, as well as administration of the program more effective for the staff (San Bernardino County, 2015).

In addition to these barriers, there are internal and external factors that affect the ability of San Bernardino County to maintain its CalFresh participation rate. One of the main external factors is the aforementioned social stigma and negative perceptions associated with the receipt of CalFresh. TAD is continuously informing the community at large that CalFresh is not a welfare program, instead a nutrition program that is geared to improve access to healthy foods to all eligible Californians (San Bernardino County, 2015). The main internal factor that affects San Bernardino County's ability to maintain

its CalFresh participation rate is the department's ability to manage and administer multiple social services programs. Unfortunately, the funding allocations received to administer these programs and services are not always in line with the community's need for such services (San Bernardino County, 2015).

Imperial County

Surrounded by San Diego County to the west, Riverside County to the north, the state of Arizona to the east and Mexico to the south, Imperial County is the ninth largest county in California, covering 4, 597 square miles (Imperial County Community and Economic Development (CED), 2014). Imperial County is home to 179,091 people making it the 31st most populated County in the state (California Demographics, 2015). The county's racial make up is 81.8 percent Hispanic/Latino, 12.8 percent White, 3.5 percent Black or African American, 2.6 percent American Indian or Alaska Native and 2.4 percent Asian (US Census Bureau, 2015). With a median annual income of \$41,807, Imperial County's economy is agriculture based, and it has an unemployment rate of 20 percent, well above the state average unemployment rate of 6.8 percent (US Census Bureau, 2015 & EDD, 2015).

The Imperial County Department of Social Services is responsible for administering public assistance programs, including CalFresh, within the county. The department seeks to "provide qualified individuals and families with program benefits to access quality health care and assist in supplying a healthy diet" (Imperial County Department of Social Services, 2009, section 9). In 2013, the number of people participating in the CalFresh program totaled 37,083; in 2014, the number of participants increased to 40,394; this equates to an 8.9 percent increase in program participation

(CDSS, 2015). CFPA currently ranks Imperial County as 4th in the state in terms of its CalFresh participation rate. Imperial County's CalFresh participation rate is calculated at 88.4 percent, which indicates that of the CalFresh eligible individuals that reside in the county, only 11.6 percent of them are not receiving CalFresh benefits (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). It is because of this that Imperial County's Department of Social Services is also focused on maintaining their high CalFresh participation rate.

There are three factors that contribute to Imperial County's CalFresh participation rate: economy, program access and outreach (Imperial County, 2015). The agriculture-based economy, which primarily consists of cyclical fieldwork, plays a key role in the county's high CalFresh participation rate. As a result, the county has the 2nd highest unemployment rate in the state, behind Colusa County with 22.7 percent (EDD, 2015). Increased access to programs and services is ensured via outstations in outlying areas. This allows for individuals and families without transportation to have access to the programs and services offered by Imperial County's Department of Social Services. Lastly, outreach efforts in place at the department include working collaboratively with community partners, faith based organizations and other county departments. By promoting outreach throughout the county, Imperial County's partner agencies are able to advocate for program participation and increase access to the services offered by the Department of Social Services (Imperial County, 2015).

As with San Bernardino County, Imperial County is also looking to maintain its CalFresh participation rate. The following factors have been identified as barriers to maintaining Imperial County's CalFresh participation rate:

- Loss of contact with the county, primarily with individuals with unconventional living situations (homeless individuals) and unreported changes of address.
- Failure to submit regulatory forms on time.
- Fluctuating income due to cyclical fieldwork.
- Participant’s understanding of reporting responsibilities and program requirements (Imperial County, 2015).

In addition to these barriers, external factors such as unreliable postal mail delivery and fluctuations in county population, due to seasonal and migrant farmworkers, have forced the Department of Social Services to take a proactive approach to reduce churning. As a result, the department has increased customer contact in order to inform customers of the status of their benefits. Additionally, warranted good cause is applied to cases that discontinued in error in order to avoid having the customer reapply for benefits (Imperial County, 2015). Internally, the department has a less than ideal number of eligibility staff that is responsible for the high workload that is a result of the community’s need for its services. Consequently, the department is faced with the untimely processing of annual renewals. To combat this, the department has hired on new staff and is monitoring casework in order to improve departmental efficiency.

Tulare County

“Centrally located within the state of California, Tulare County is situated in a delightful and geographically-diverse region. The county includes an area of 4,863 square miles” (Tulare County, 2015a, para. 1). Surrounded by Fresno County to the north, Inyo County to the east, Kern County to the south and Kings County to the west, Tulare County is home to 458,198 people making it the 18th most populated county in the state

(California Demographics, 2015). The county's racial make up is 62.3 percent Hispanic/Latino, 30.9 percent White, 4 percent Asian, 2.8 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.2 percent Black or African American (US Census Bureau, 2015). Its economy is based on heavy agriculture as "[T]he extensively cultivated and very fertile valley floor...has allowed Tulare County to become the second-leading producer of agricultural commodities in the United States" (Tulare County, 2015a). The median annual income is \$42,708 and the county has an unemployment rate of 13.4 percent, also well above the state average unemployment rate (US Census Bureau, 2015 & EDD, 2015).

The Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), the agency responsible for administering public assistance programs, including CalFresh, in Tulare County provided CalFresh benefits to 114,774 individuals in the county in 2013. In 2014, HHSA provided CalFresh benefits to 132,774 individuals in the community. This increase in participation equates to a 15.7 percent increase in participation from 2013 to 2014 (DCSS, 2015).

CFPA calculated Tulare County's CalFresh participation rate at 86.3 percent. This indicates that only 13.7 percent of CalFresh eligible individuals are not enrolled in the program. Out of 58 counties in the state, Tulare County is ranked of 7th in terms of its CalFresh participation rate (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014).

There are two factors that have allowed Tulare County to maintain its CalFresh participation rate they are: program access and outreach (Tulare County, 2015b).

Program access throughout Tulare County is ensured via HHSA's five regional offices. Each of the five locations is able to provide same day service to applicants. Additionally, HHSA has two dedicated units responsible for all mail-in, fax and online applications

received via their mybenefitscalwin.org website. Eligibility workers in these units are responsible to contact each customer to conduct the eligibility interview via the phone. HHSA also has outstation workers at twenty-one certification sites that allow customers to meet with eligibility staff throughout the county. Eligibility workers at these sites have the ability to assist customers with the application process for all programs and services offered by HHSA. Additionally, the workers can assist customers to resolve potential issues about established cases, such as the completion of regulatory forms and obtaining required verifications from the customer (Tulare County, 2015b). HHSA customers who are unable to come in to a HHSA office are often referred to one of the twenty-one certification sites; if needed, a HHSA staff member will conduct a home visit in order to assist homebound customers to receive the services offered by HHSA. Tulare County is also focusing on reducing churn by actively investigating cases that are set to close. Customers whose benefits are to discontinue due to a missing reports or verifications receive a courtesy call from a HHSA representative reminding them that the reports and/or verifications are still required in order to continue their benefits (Tulare County, 2015b).

Outreach efforts at HHSA include working closely with local non-profits, CBOs and other county departments to promote CalFresh within the county. One area of key importance is the department's partnership with the Kings/Tulare Area Agency on Aging (KTAAA). KTAAA provides valuable outreach to the county's senior population by providing basic computer skills. These basic computer skills allow the elderly population in Tulare County to apply for benefits online through the department's online application system (Tulare County, 2015b).

San Benito County

San Benito County encompasses 1,391 square miles and is home to 58,267 people making it the 42nd most populated County in the state (San Benito County, 2015 & California Demographics, 2015). The county's racial make up is 57.9 percent Hispanic/Latino, 36.6 percent White, 3.4 percent Asian, 3.1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.3 percent Black or African American (US Census Bureau, 2015). Its unemployment rate is at 8.9 percent and its median annual income is \$66,237 (EDD, 2015 & US Census Bureau, 2015).

San Benito County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) is responsible for administering the CalFresh program. In 2013, HHSA provided CalFresh benefits to 6,232 individuals. By the end of 2014 the number of participating individuals decreased to 6,169, in which caused a one percent decrease in individuals served within San Benito County (CDSS, 2015). San Benito County's CalFresh participation rate has been calculated as 68.3 percent and given an overall rank of twenty-four out of fifty-eight counties (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). Based on this information, San Benito County's main focus is to increase its CalFresh participation rate in order to better serve its community by addressing some of the barriers to increasing their CalFresh participation rate.

San Benito County's HHSA has identified the following barriers to increasing their CalFresh participations rate:

- The stigma and misconceptions associated with public assistance benefits.
- Limited outreach activities within the county.
- Complex program regulations.

To address these barriers, San Benito County has partnered with the local health department to promote SNAP-Ed, a federally funded program that aims “to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy choices within a limited budget” (USDA FNS, 2015, para. 1). To address its limited outreach activities, San Benito County’s HHSA will be attending the second annual CalFresh Forum in the early part of May, 2015.

Santa Clara County

Commonly referred to as the “Silicon Valley,” Santa Clara County encompasses 1,312 square miles making it the largest county in the Bay Area (Santa Clara County, 2012). Surrounded by Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties to the west, Alameda County to the north, Stanislaus and Merced counties to the east and San Benito County to the south, Santa Clara County is home to 1,894,605 people, making it the 6th most populated county in the state (California Demographics, 2015). Its racial make up is 34.1 percent Asian, 33.9 percent White, 26.8 percent Hispanic/Latino, 2.9 percent Black or African American, and 1.4 percent American Indian or Alaska Native (US Census Bureau, 2015). Santa Clara County “is a major employment center for the region, providing more than a quarter of all jobs in the Bay Area” (Santa Clara County, 2012, para. 4). The county’s median annual income is \$91,702 and it has the lowest unemployment rate of the surveyed counties, 4.3 percent, which is far below the state average (US Census Bureau, 2015 & EDD, 2015).

The Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS), a subset of the county’s Social Services Agency, is responsible for administering the CalFresh program throughout the county. One of DEBS’ primary goals is to “Reduce the number of hungry

children/adults/families by outreaching and conducting community-wide food/nutrition campaigns to make nutrition services more accessible and available to more food stamp and Food Bank clients” (Santa Clara County, 2014, goal 3). As a result, in 2013, DEBS was able to provide CalFresh benefits to 110,622 individuals residing in Santa Clara County. At the end of 2014, the number of individuals receiving CalFresh benefits increased to 113,439, a 2.5 percent increase from the previous year (CDSS, 2015). Given the population of Santa Clara County, DEBS is struggling to improve its CalFresh participation rate. With a 57.3 percent participation rate, Santa Clara County is currently ranked 38th in the state in terms of its CalFresh participation (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). Unfortunately, 42.7 percent of potentially CalFresh eligible individuals residing in Santa Clara County are not receiving this valuable benefit. Consequently, DEBS seeks to meet its aforementioned goal by increasing the CalFresh participation rate in its County.

DEBS has identified the following five barriers to increasing their CalFresh participation rate:

- Lack of funding to market and promote community awareness of CalFresh.
- Resource limitations making it difficult to staff outreach events.
- The county’s large undocumented, non-citizen population combined with program misconceptions (myths).
- Higher minimum wages than other counties; minimum wage in the city of San Jose is \$10.15 per hour while the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour.
- Customer’s unwillingness to complete the application process due to the potential receipt of the minimum benefit amount of \$16 per month (Santa Clara County, 2015).

In addition to these barriers, DEBS has noted that program requirements are not adjusted to take into consideration the county's high cost of living. As a result, individuals who are potentially eligible may not be entitled to receive CalFresh due to the program's strict income guidelines and its requirement to pass the net income test (as noted in the introduction of this study).

In order to address these barriers, DEBS is committed to implementing outreach and in-reach activities. DEBS works collaboratively with its primary outreach partner, ~~the~~ Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB). SHFB conducts outreach activities by promoting CalFresh throughout the county and assisting individuals with the application process (Santa Clara County, 2015). The promotion of in-reach within DEBS is primarily done through the delivery of CalFresh flyers to individuals receiving only Medi-Cal and/or General Assistance benefits. CalFresh flyers are also mailed out to customers at the time of their annual Medi-Cal renewal. Most importantly, DEBS has begun to focus its efforts on managing churn by sending reminder calls to customers who have scheduled appointments or need to submit required paperwork (Santa Clara County, 2015).

Monterey County

Surrounded by Santa Cruz County to the north, San Benito, Fresno and Kings Counties to the east, San Luis Obispo County to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west, Monterey County is home to 431,344 people, making it the 20th most populated county in the state (California Demographics, 2015). Its racial make up is 56.8 percent Hispanic/Latino, 31.6 percent White, 6.9 percent Asian, 3.6 percent Black or African American, and 2.7 percent American Indian or Alaska Native (US Census Bureau, 2015). Its economy is driven by agriculture as "The rich Salinas Valley extends through the

heart of the County, making Monterey the third largest agricultural county in California” (Monterey County Economic Development Department, 2011, para 2). Monterey County’s unemployment rate is at 11.6 percent and its median annual income is \$59,168 (EDD, 2015 & US Census Bureau, 2015).

In 2013, Monterey County’s Department of Social Services (DSS) provided CalFresh benefits to 46,145 individuals in the county. By 2014, the number of individuals benefiting from this program increased by 6.5 percent, to a total of 49,132 (CDSS, 2015). Monterey County’s CalFresh participation rate is calculated to be 56.2 percent and an overall ranking of forty-one out of the state’s fifty-eight counties (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). Like Santa Clara County, Monterey County is also struggling to increase its CalFresh participation rate.

DSS has identified the following barriers to increasing its CalFresh participation rate:

- Misconceptions and myths about the program.
- Public assumption that the receipt of CalFresh is considered to be a “public charge” and affect it can have on an individual’s path to citizenship.
- Belief that the application process is hard, tenuous and excessive.
- Preconceived beliefs that individuals here legally receive different treatment than those here illegally.
- Attrition rates within the department make it difficult to properly serve the needs of the community (Monterey County, 2015).

To address these barriers, DSS has begun to shift its focus on outreach and customer service.

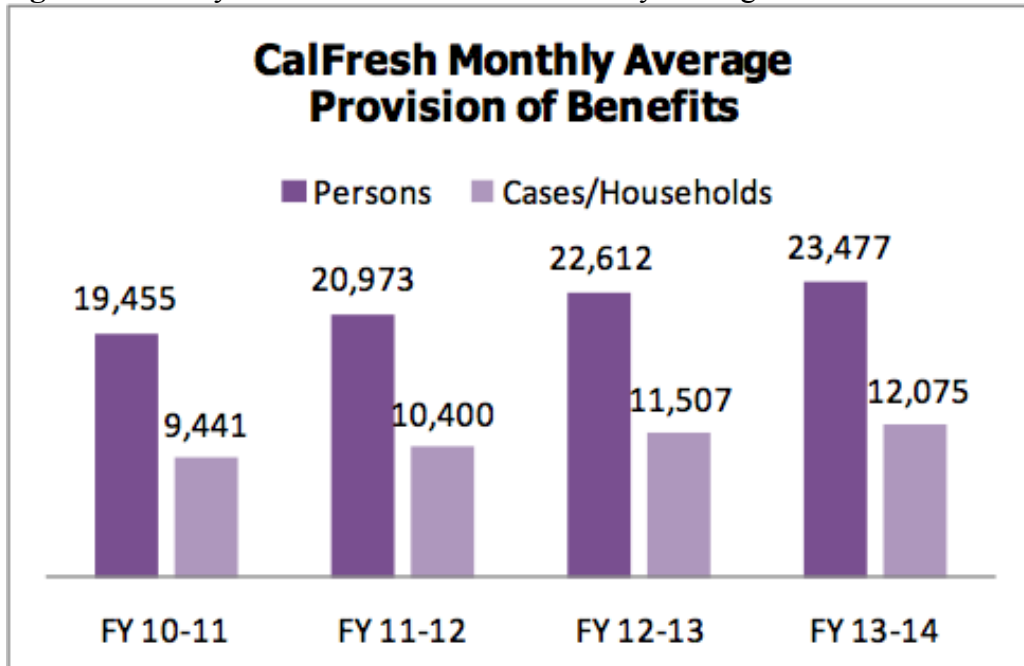
Outreach efforts in place at DSS are conducted via collaborative work with community partners throughout the county. DSS partners with the Food Bank of Monterey County and Catholic Charities to promote CalFresh and distribute applications for benefits to Food Bank customers. In order to better reach the community, DSS has outstation staff at local Women, Infants and Children (WIC) offices throughout Monterey County to take and process applications for benefits (Monterey County, 2015). Customer service is addressed at DSS via the ongoing recruitment of new eligibility staff. Each year, DSS conducts three sets of induction training classes for newly hired eligibility staff.

County of Santa Cruz

With a geographic area of 445 square miles, the County of Santa Cruz is the second smallest county in the state, the smallest being San Francisco County (US Census Bureau, 2015). Neighboring the County of Santa Cruz are San Mateo County to the north, Santa Clara County to the east, San Benito and Monterey Counties to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The county is home to 271,804 people and its racial make up is 58.6 percent Hispanic/Latino, 32.9 percent White, 4.8 percent Asian, 1.8 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.4 percent Black or African American (US Census Bureau, 2015). “Santa Cruz County’s strong local economy is anchored by vibrant high technology, agriculture and tourism” (County of Santa Cruz, 2012, para 5). The median annual income is \$66,519 and its unemployment rate is 9.8 percent, higher than the state average unemployment rate of 6.8 percent (US Census Bureau, 2015 & EDD, 2015).

The Employment and Benefit Services Division (EBSD), a subset of the Human Services Department (HSD) of the County of Santa Cruz, has identified the need to “Ensure residents’ needs are met by increasing participation in the CalFresh food assistance program” (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2014, p. 5). According to DCSS, in 2013 the County of Santa Cruz provided CalFresh benefits to 22,732 individuals; by the end of 2014, the number of individuals receiving CalFresh benefits in the county increased by 4.3 percent, to a total of 23,719 (CDSS, 2015). Figure 7 below depicts the average number of individuals per month receiving CalFresh benefits, based on the July – June fiscal year. The County of Santa Cruz is currently ranked 47th in the state in terms of its CalFresh participation rate. This ranking indicates that an astonishing 47.6 percent of CalFresh eligible individuals are not participating in the program (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). In order to meet the needs of the county’s underserved population, EBSD is working to increase its CalFresh participation rate.

Figure 7: County of Santa Cruz CalFresh Monthly Average Provision of Benefits.



Source: County of Santa Cruz, 2014, p. 9.

Like the aforementioned counties struggling to increase their CalFresh participation rate, EBSD has identified the following barriers to participation:

- Program myths and stigma.
- Inaccurate program information.
- Complex program regulations.
- Inability to align social services programs due to conflicting requirements

(County of Santa Cruz, 2015).

To address these barriers and increase the program participation rate in the county, EBSD has focused its effort on CalFresh outreach. Outreach efforts have been in place in the County of Santa Cruz since 2010. EBSD has partnered with SHFB to conduct CalFresh outreach, education and application assistance. Further outreach activities include SNAP-Ed, senior citizen and student outreach, and working with CBOs and other county departments to promote CalFresh (County of Santa Cruz, 2015).

In addition, HSD recently updated its three-year plan that was submitted to DCSS in early 2013. The revised plan includes additional focus on in-reach and customer service (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015). In-reach efforts at EBSD are primarily geared towards customers applying for or receiving Medi-Cal benefits. This is clearly noted in their revised plan, which states, “In an effort to engage Medi-Cal applicants and recipients and explore new strategies to expand CalFresh participation, the County of Santa Cruz continues to conduct ‘in-reach’ efforts to encourage those Medi-Cal clients not receiving nutrition assistance to apply for CalFresh” (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 2). Some of the current in-reach efforts employed by EBSD are:

- In-reach to Medi-Cal recipients – geared to recipients with potentially eligible Medi-Cal aid codes.
- Medi-Cal applicants – a CalFresh information flyer and application are mailed with initial Medi-Cal correspondence.
- Healthy Families and Low Income Health Plan transition to Medi-Cal – once transitioned to Medi-Cal, a CalFresh information flyer and application is mailed to the customer.
- Affordable Care Act (ACA) – with the expanded Medi-Cal eligibility under the ACA, enrollment in the Medi-Cal program increased by 20,000 in the County of Santa Cruz. Outreach to these new enrollees has begun.
- Baby Gateway – a unique program in the county that started in 2012 which allows Certified Application Assistors (CAAs) at local hospitals to enroll newborns whose birth was covered by Medi-Cal. If the parent is not on CalFresh, the CAA will provide assistance with the application process.
- In-reach to other Human Services Department Divisions – these include Family & Children’s Services (FCS) and the Adult and Long Term Care (ALTC) Divisions (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015).

As evident by the previously mentioned in-reach efforts, the County of Santa Cruz is actively working to increase participation in the CalFresh program.

Customer Service within EBSD is focused on two specific models: Intake Redesign, and Customer Experience 2.0. In September 2013, “Intake practices in the Customer Service Centers were redesigned to improve the application experience for clients applying for CalFresh and other public benefit programs by expediting the process

of gathering information in order to determine eligibility for benefits” (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 4). Benefits received by the implementation of the intake redesign model include:

- Customer service kiosk for efficient customer service.
- A reception area navigator who will direct applicants to the services that best fit their needs.
- Computer stations that allow electronic self-applications via www.mybenefitscalwin.org.
- Phone stations that provide a direct link to call center services.
- Access to scanners to confidentially upload required verifications (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 4).

By implementing the intake redesign model, EBSD hopes to promote better customer access, and prompt eligibility determinations for customers requesting services from the division (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015).

“The Customer Experience 2.0 is EBSD’s deliberate effort to dramatically improve and standardize the experience that each customer has in each interaction with the division” (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 4). The success of the Customer Experience 2.0 lies with the following key components: WE CARE Standard Interaction Model, and Improved Technologies (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015). The WE CARE standard interaction model ensures “that all staff members are interacting with customers in manner that is clear and consistent, regardless of whether that experience is over the phone or in person” (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 4).

Improved technologies within EBSD include telephonic signature, mass communication and My Benefits CalWIN. As noted in HSD's revised plan to increase CalFresh participation, "An important strategy for increasing the number of new applications being processed successfully is the use of telephonic signature" (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 5). Although the technology is still in its pilot phase, once fully incorporated into EBSD's business process, the telephonic signature will allow applications and annual re-certifications to be completed via phone, without the need to obtain a physical signature from the customer.

Mass communications have been developed in order to "communicate with customers using a number of communication tools in order to deliver key messages in a consistent and comprehensive manner" (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 5). The tools involved with EBSD's mass communication efforts include automated text messages, and robo-calls to remind customers of required paperwork being mailed out or overdue. EBSD began using this technology in April 2015 and is waiting to see the impact it has on reducing churn and improving the CalFresh participation rate.

The use of the mybenefitscalwin.org website allows "public assistance applicants and recipients to access online information regarding their public assistance benefits" (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 5). EBSD encourages all customers to use this website in order to:

- Check their benefit status
 - Submit/continue application
 - Submit periodic report (SAR7/MSR)
 - Submit renewal paperwork online
 - Check current case status
 - Review up to 6-months' case history
 - Obtain Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card balance
 - Review monthly benefit amounts
 - Request verification of assistance letter
 - Report abuse and/or fraud
 - Review information on fair hearings
 - Contact a worker by e-mail
 - View Electronic Notice of Action
- (County of Santa Cruz HSD, 2015, p. 5)

V. Analysis

The intent of this study is to conduct a comparison of six counties, and their administering agencies in the state of California, in order to determine what they are doing to increase and/or maintain their CalFresh participation rates, and to see if their processes can be incorporated into the County of Santa Cruz’s efforts to increase its CalFresh participation rate. Recommendations, if any, will be based on identified differences in business practices between the referenced counties and the County of Santa Cruz.

A county-by-county comparison of the findings of this study indicate that the County of Santa Cruz has in place similar business practices and strategies to those counties included in this study. Table 7 depicts the strategies in use among the counties surveyed in this study.

Table 7: Strategies to Increase the CalFresh Participation Rate

Strategies to Increase the CalFresh Participation Rate							
	San Bernardino	Imperial	Tulare	San Benito	Santa Clara	Monterey	Santa Cruz
Technology	✓						✓
Marketing	✓						✓
Outreach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
In-Reach	✓				✓		✓
Customer Service	✓					✓	✓
Program Access		✓	✓				

Common Strategies

San Bernardino & the County of Santa Cruz

A comparison of San Bernardino County and the County of Santa Cruz can appear to be invalid as San Bernardino County is by far the larger and most populated county in this study. However, given the fact that each county’s racial make-up consists

of a majority of minorities, Hispanic, as well as a strong presence of agriculture in their economies, this comparison is in fact valid.

As noted earlier, San Bernardino County credits its high participation rate to TAD's incorporation of five key operational strategies: use of technology, marketing, outreach, in-reach and enhanced customer service. In an effort to increase its CalFresh participation rate, the County of Santa Cruz's EBSD has taken a similar approach by incorporating similar operational strategies. Although the details of each strategy differ between the counties, the intent of each strategy remains the same: to optimize participation levels in the CalFresh program in order to ensure that the community's needs are being met.

Imperial County & the County of Santa Cruz.

Similar to San Bernardino County, commonalities between Imperial County and the County of Santa Cruz include its Hispanic majority population and strong presence of agriculture in their economies. As noted earlier, Imperial County's CalFresh participation is in part due to its economy, which consists of cyclical fieldwork. While the County of Santa Cruz shares a similar economy, its CalFresh participation rate is much lower, exactly thirty-six percent below that of Imperial County. As a result, it can be said that economic factors in the County of Santa Cruz are not directly correlated to its CalFresh participation rate.

Of the two operational strategies in place at Imperial County's DSS, this study finds that outreach is the only strategy present at the County of Santa Cruz's HSD. At both counties, outreach strategies are similar in nature, as both counties work collaboratively with CBOs and other government departments to promote CalFresh in the

community. Program access, the second strategy in place at Imperial County's DSS, is primarily geared to ensure the community has access to the programs and services offered by DSS. To achieve this, DSS has outstation staff present at outlying areas in the community. This strategy allows DSS staff to reach individuals and families in the community who, for whatever reason, are unable to visit their local DSS office.

Tulare County & the County of Santa Cruz

Like the prior counties, Tulare County and the County of Santa Cruz share the same demographic and economic characteristics: the majority of their population is comprised of Hispanics and both have a strong agriculture-based economy. In addition, just like Imperial County, Tulare and the County of Santa Cruz share a common operational strategy for maintaining/increasing their CalFresh participation rate: outreach.

The one strategy in place at Tulare County that is not in place at the County of Santa Cruz is program access. For Tulare County, program access consists of two key factors: same-day services are available to applicants at each of their five regional offices and HHSA has outstation staff at each of their twenty-one certification sites throughout the county. By providing these services, HHSA is able to issue timely benefits to those in need and provide a variety of HHSA services throughout the county.

San Benito County & the County of Santa Cruz

San Benito County's proximity to the County of Santa Cruz makes it an ideal county to compare, as both counties have like characteristics. Not only do both counties have similar racial make up and economies, agriculture, but both are in close proximity to the Silicon Valley, which allows the residents of these two counties to have access to higher paying jobs. When looking at each county's CalFresh participation rate, San

Benito is ranked 24th in the state while the County of Santa Cruz is ranked 47th (Birnbach & Shimada, 2014). As a result of these rankings, both are struggling to increase their participation rate. This study finds that San Benito's main strategy to increase participation is outreach, which consists primarily of its partnership with other government departments to promote CalFresh and SNAP-Ed. The County of Santa Cruz has a similar practice in place, but differs in the fact that their partnership is not only with other government departments with by CBOs such as SHFB.

Santa Clara County and the County of Santa Cruz

A comparison of these two counties seems to be the least warranted, as the typical similarities that were identified in the prior comparisons are not present. Santa Clara County is by far the most opposite of the counties in this study as Hispanics/Latinos are not the majority demographic in the county; agriculture only plays a minor role in the overall economy of the county and the median annual income in Santa Clara County is the highest of all the counties surveyed. However, its close proximity to the County of Santa Cruz combined with the close relations between the Santa Clara County SSA and County of Santa Cruz HSD make the comparison of these two counties credible.

There are two operational strategies in place to increase the CalFresh participation rate in Santa Clara County: outreach and in-reach. Both of these strategies are also present at the County of Santa Cruz. There is little difference between outreach strategies in each county, as both work collaboratively with SHFB to promote CalFresh throughout the community. In-reach strategies are also similar in nature as both counties focus their efforts on bringing in current recipients of other public assistance benefits.

Monterey County & the County of Santa Cruz

Monterey County's has the following commonalities in place with its neighbor to the north, the County of Santa Cruz: demographics, a majority its of residents are Hispanic/Latino, and agriculture-based economy. Of the counties surveyed, Monterey County has the second lowest CalFresh participation rate, behind the County of Santa Cruz. As a result, both Monterey County's DSS and the County of Santa Cruz's HSD are struggling to increase their CalFresh participation rate.

Like its predecessors, Monterey County also has in place similar outreach strategies to those of the County of Santa Cruz that are aimed to promote and increase participation in the CalFresh program. However, an additional operational factor that is in place at both county agencies is customer service. For Monterey County, customer service takes form in the continual recruitment of eligibility staff. This is primarily done to ensure that the County of Monterey has sufficient staff to meet the needs of its community. For the County of Santa Cruz, customer service is conducted via the incorporation of its Intake Redesign and Customer Experience 2.0 models.

Barriers to Participation

Just like there are common strategies in place to increase and/or maintain each county's CalFresh participation rate, there are also several common barriers to increasing and /or maintaining it. Table 8 notes the most common barriers to participation identified by each of the counties in this study.

Table 8: Barriers to Participation

Barriers to Participation							
	San Bernardino	Imperial	Tulare	San Benito	Santa Clara	Monterey	Santa Cruz
Myths and Stigma	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Complex Regulations	✓	✓		✓			✓
Program Alignment	✓						✓
Resource Limitations				✓	✓	✓	
Inaccurate Program Information	✓	✓				✓	✓

Of the five barriers identified by the participant counties, inaccurate program information, myths and stigma are the two barriers that each county is able to address.

Inaccurate program information comes in the form of incorrect information being scattered via word of mouth (from customer to customer) or program myths.

Unfortunately, there are quite a few myths being circulated via various channels. Luckily, there is factual information available that can be used to dispel incorrect program information and myths. On their website, CDSS has published “Myths and Facts About CalFresh” (see Appendix D) which has some of the most common myths and their countering facts about the program. The County of Santa Cruz also has a similar document, in both English and Spanish, posted on its website.

Stigma can also be addressed via factual printed information, like the “Myths and Facts About CalFresh” document, or via outreach strategies, such as the dissemination of program information; and education is a major component of any county’s outreach efforts.

The three remaining barriers, complex regulations, program alignment and resource limitations, are harder to address by any agency that administers public assistance benefits. The main reason is that all three barriers are beyond the control of the administrative agency. Given the fact that most public assistance programs begin at the federal and state level, changes to program regulations and the alignment of public

assistance programs cannot start at the local level. As a result, an administrative agency's only recourse is to lobby state and federal government regulators to make changes that allow for program alignment, and for the complexities of program regulations to be eliminated or reduced. Resource limitations are also beyond the control of an administrative agency's operating budget, which is primarily funded by federal and state government funds.

VI. Recommendation and Conclusion

It has been proven that participation in the CalFresh program brings forth positive social and economic benefits to individuals and communities who receive them.

Consequently, the need to increase participation in the CalFresh program is one of the County of Santa Cruz HSD's top priorities. The findings of this study have shown that the County of Santa Cruz is doing the same as, if not more than, the comparison counties to increase its CalFresh participation rate. Of the counties surveyed, all counties use outreach as a method of increasing and/or maintaining participation in the program.

Differences in business practices were only evident with the second and third highest-ranking counties, Imperial and Tulare County. As a result, it is recommended that the County of Santa Cruz HSD incorporate program access strategies into their existing business practices. These strategies should include the promotion of accessibility to services offered by HSD throughout the community, via out-stationing of staff at various locations throughout the community, as well as offering increased availability of same-day services for applicants. The matter of whether or not this recommendation will positively impact the county's CalFresh participation rate cannot be easily determined, as it is not possible to reasonably predict or control the most important variable in this equation, human behavior. However, by incorporating this strategy into the department's day-to-day business process, the County of Santa Cruz's HSD will have in place all identified operational strategies used by more successful CalFresh programs. It is hoped that this will increase the CalFresh participation rate for the County of Santa Cruz.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Current Population Survey – Food Security Survey (CPS-FSS)

Questions Used To Assess the Food Security of Households in the CPS Food Security Survey

1. “We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
2. “The food that we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
3. “We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
4. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
5. (If yes to question 4) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
6. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
7. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn’t eat, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
8. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
9. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
10. (If yes to question 9) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

(Questions 11-18 were asked only if the household included children age 0-17)

11. “We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
12. “We couldn’t feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn’t afford that.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
13. “The children were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
14. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of any of the children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
15. In the last 12 months, were the children ever hungry but you just couldn’t afford more food? (Yes/No)
16. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
17. (If yes to question 16) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
18. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)

Source: Coleman-Jensen, et al., 2014, p. 3

Appendix B: Program Access Index 2012: All Counties by Rank.

County	PAI	Rank
Del Norte	1.204	1
Calaveras	0.947	2
San Bernardino	0.912	3
Imperial	0.884	4
Alpine	0.874	5
Fresno	0.868	6
Tulare	0.863	7
Yuba	0.858	8
Sacramento	0.856	9
Amador	0.844	10
San Joaquin	0.837	11
Stanislaus ¹	0.823	12
Solano ¹	0.823	13
Inyo	0.812	14
Shasta	0.797	15
Mendocino	0.792	16
Merced	0.781	17
Lassen	0.752	18
Madera	0.750	19
Kings	0.737	20
Tehama	0.714	21
El Dorado	0.707	22
Mariposa	0.705	23
San Benito	0.683	24
Kern	0.678	25
Riverside	0.677	26
Alameda	0.664	27
Ventura	0.654	28
Siskiyou	0.650	29

County	PAI	Rank
Lake	0.649	30
Tuolumne	0.647	31
Sutter	0.644	32
Butte	0.636	33
Humboldt	0.599	34
Trinity	0.595	35
Los Angeles	0.594	36
Contra Costa	0.586	37
Santa Clara	0.573	38
Nevada	0.572	39
Glenn	0.565	40
Monterey	0.562	41
Placer	0.542	42
Orange	0.536	43
Plumas	0.535	44
Sierra	0.530	45
San Francisco	0.525	46
Santa Cruz	0.524	47
San Diego	0.517	48
Sonoma	0.512	49
Modoc	0.465	50
San Luis Obispo	0.438	51
Napa	0.434	52
Colusa	0.429	53
San Mateo ²	0.427	54
Marin ²	0.427	55
Santa Barbara	0.424	56
Yolo	0.407	57
Mono	0.333	58

¹⁻²The PAI is listed here with three significant digits. However, the PAI used to calculate the county ranking contained 15 significant digits. Viewed with four significant digits, Stanislaus County's PAI is 0.8234 and Solano County's PAI is 0.8227. Thus, their respective ranks are 12 and 13. Similarly, San Mateo County's PAI is 0.4275 and Marin County's PAI is 0.4268.

Source: Birnbach & Shimada, 2014, p. 5.

Appendix C

CalFresh Participation Survey Questions

1. What is your role in your county's administration of the CalFresh program?

2. How long have you been in this role?

3. According to the California Food Policy Advocates your county's CaFresh participation rate is XX%, making your ranking XXth among the 58 counties. What do you think contributes to your county's CalFresh participation rate?

4. Does your county work with any community partners in order to increase the CalFresh Participation? If so, which ones and what is their role? To what extent do they work with you?

5. Does your county use “in-reach” in order to increase/maintain participation in the CalFresh program? If yes, what exactly do you do? If no, are you considering it?

6. What do you consider are the top five barriers to increasing participation in the CalFresh program in your county?

7. Are there any external factors that affect your county’s ability to maintain/increase its CalFresh participation? If so, what are they and how does your county manage them?

8. Are there any internal factors that affect your county's ability to maintain/increase its CalFresh participation? If so, what are they and how does your county manage them?

9. What is your county doing to manage/reduce churning?

10. Is there anything else that you think would help the County of Santa Cruz increase its CalFresh participation rate?

Appendix D

Myths & Facts about CalFresh

MYTH: You have to give stamps to the cashier at the grocery store in order to use CalFresh benefits.

FACT: The CalFresh Program no longer uses paper stamps or coupons. CalFresh benefits are deposited to your Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card that looks and works like a debit card with a PIN number. You can check your balance over the phone. You can use your EBT card at most places that sell food, such as supermarkets and some farmers' markets.

MYTH: Increasing CalFresh participation will cost California taxpayers more money.

FACT: CalFresh is an entitlement program and is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

MYTH: CalFresh is like welfare and you are considered a "Public Charge" when you receive CalFresh benefits.

FACT: CalFresh is not welfare and it is not cash aid. It is funded by USDA. "Public Charge" is a term used to describe an individual who is likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence, as demonstrated by the receipt of public cash assistance or use of long-term care at government expense. CalFresh is not cash aid, and you will not be considered a "Public Charge" if you receive CalFresh.

MYTH: Receiving CalFresh will hurt my chances for becoming a U.S. citizen.

FACT: Receiving CalFresh will not hurt your chances of becoming a citizen. It is not a welfare program and is not cash aid.

MYTH: If I enroll in CalFresh, I will be taking benefits from someone else who needs it more.

FACT: CalFresh is an entitlement program, which means that all who are eligible and apply will receive benefits. You are not "taking someone else's place" if you apply. USDA sets aside funds for the program.

MYTH: The county office takes my fingerprints and sends them to the government.

FACT: As of January 1, 2012, in California you no longer need to provide fingerprints when applying only for CalFresh.

MYTH: I need to be employed or have some income to receive CalFresh.

FACT: Employment is not an eligibility requirement for CalFresh and there is no minimum income requirement. You may receive CalFresh if you earn money from a job, get unemployment benefits, get child support, own a house or a car, get disability benefits, or have money in savings.

MYTH: I can only buy certain types of food with CalFresh benefits.

FACT: You cannot use CalFresh to buy non- food items such as cigarettes or tobacco, pet food, soaps, paper products, household supplies, vitamins, and medicines, even if they are sold at food stores.

You can buy any food or drink except alcohol or foods that will be eaten in the store, including prepared hot foods. If you are age 60 or older, have a disability, or you are homeless, you may be able to use your EBT card at approved restaurants in counties that operate a Restaurant Meals Program. You can also buy seeds and plants that produce food for the household to eat.

Eligibility, Applications, and Interviews

MYTH: Everyone must go to the CalFresh office for an interview.

FACT: You may apply for CalFresh online at <http://www.benefitscal.org/>, by mail, or at the county CalFresh office. Intake interviews are usually done over the phone. If you don't have a phone, are unable to keep a phone appointment, or would prefer an appointment in the office, you can request one.

MYTH: You have to go to the CalFresh office every few months to continue receiving benefits.

FACT: If all adults in your household are age 60 or older or have a disability, you may get benefits for up to two years at a time. You or your authorized representative can update your case over the phone or by submitting a report to the county.

MYTH: If I am receiving Social Security Retirement or Disability benefits, I am not eligible for CalFresh.

FACT: Both Social Security (SSA) benefit and Disability (SSDI and SDI) benefit recipients may be eligible for CalFresh. In fact, households that have people age 60 or older, or people with a disability, don't have to pass the gross income test. In California, people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) also receive a state-funded Supplemental Security Payment (SSP) that includes a food benefit. SSI/SSP recipients are therefore NOT eligible for CalFresh unless the SSP amount is \$0 as a result of state budget reductions. However, other household members who are not receiving SSI/ SSP might still be eligible.

MYTH: I cannot receive CalFresh if I own or buy a home.

FACT: Individuals can own or buy a home and still receive CalFresh. Home ownership will not count when you apply for CalFresh.

MYTH: If I own a car or have a savings account and/or retirement account I will not qualify for CalFresh.

FACT: You can own a car, have a savings account and/or retirement account and may still qualify for CalFresh. Basic CalFresh eligibility is usually determined based on income, not assets.

Households

MYTH: CalFresh is only for mothers or families with children.

FACT: CalFresh is for everyone meeting the eligibility guidelines. Fathers, single adults, people with disabilities, homeless individuals, and people age 60 or older may qualify for CalFresh.

MYTH: I am not related to the people in my household, or the people I live with are not my immediate family, so we are not eligible to apply for CalFresh together.

FACT: For the purposes of CalFresh, a “household” can be an individual living and cooking alone or a group of individuals who live together, are not necessarily related, and buy and prepare food together. In certain cases, a residence may have more than one household, if the eligible people living together buy and prepare food separately.

Benefit Types and Amounts

MYTH: I will only receive \$16 a month in CalFresh benefits.

FACT: Benefit amounts depend on each household’s unique situation and individual amounts can range from \$16 per month to \$200 per month. In 2011, the average benefit per person was \$147 per month in California.

MYTH: If a citizen or legal resident in my household applies for CalFresh, undocumented members of the household will be deported.

FACT: CalFresh is intended to make sure that those who are eligible have access to CalFresh. Confidentiality is strictly enforced and client records are not shared or reported to Immigration. For example, an undocumented mother can apply for CalFresh on behalf of her citizen child and does not need to be concerned about deportation.

MYTH: Signing up for CalFresh will affect my immigration status or be used against me when I go to get Legal Permanent Residency or U.S. citizenship.

FACT: Non-cash benefits like CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and WIC will not affect immigration status and will not be used against you.

Children

MYTH: My children will have to repay CalFresh benefits when they turn 18.

FACT: CalFresh is not a loan. You do not need to pay back benefits that you were legally entitled to receive.

MYTH: My children will be drafted into the military in order to repay their CalFresh.

FACT: Your children will not be drafted because of CalFresh or other benefits received.

MYTH: My children might be taken away from me if I receive CalFresh.

FACT: Your children will not be taken away from you if you apply for CalFresh. CalFresh helps to ensure that your children have healthy food to eat.

MYTH: People age 60 and older do not receive credit for medical and prescription drug bills.

FACT: Certain medical expenses may be deducted from the household's gross income for people age 60 or older or people with a disability.

MYTH: Elderly households who receive CalFresh will not be able to receive home-delivered meals.

FACT: Households can receive both CalFresh and home-delivered meals.

MYTH: I applied for CalFresh in the past and did not qualify. I cannot apply again.

FACT: There may have been changes to your circumstances and/or to regulations. It is appropriate to reapply if you are in need.

Citizenship or Legal Residency

MYTH: If I am undocumented and if I go to the county office on behalf of my family, the workers will turn me in. Immigration authorities check the CalFresh office records.

FACT: Confidentiality is strictly enforced at the CalFresh office and client records cannot be checked or shared with immigration authorities. The only time you should be concerned is if there is a warrant for your arrest; if so, your name will be turned in to the authorities.

MYTH: If I get CalFresh benefits my kids will not be able to get reduced-price lunch at school. I will not be able to get WIC if I get CalFresh benefits.

FACT: You may get WIC, free or reduced-price meals, and CalFresh at the same time. In fact, if you are eligible for CalFresh, you are automatically eligible for free school meals. All of these programs help to ensure that you and your family can access healthy food.

People without Homes

MYTH: People who are without housing are not eligible for CalFresh because you must have housing and a mailing address.

FACT: You do not have to have a permanent address to apply for CalFresh. County offices are required to provide options regarding mailing alternatives for applicants to facilitate participation in the program. These options may include the use of P.O. boxes, alternative mailing addresses, general delivery pick-up (USPS), and pick-up at the local county office. If you live in a shelter, you can bring a letter from a shelter employee that says you live there when you apply. You may also bring a letter from a family member or friend to have mail sent to their home on your behalf.

MYTH: People who live in shelters can't get CalFresh because they already get free meals.

FACT: You can get CalFresh even if you live in a shelter with meals.

MYTH: I need to have a kitchen or place to prepare the food I buy with CalFresh benefits.

FACT: You can receive CalFresh even if you do not have a place to prepare food. Those age 60 or older, homeless individuals, or individuals with a disability who do not have a place to prepare food may be able to use their CalFresh benefits to purchase prepared food at authorized restaurants through the Restaurant Meals Program in certain counties.

Source: CDSS, 2012.

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