

The Food Stamp Program in Oregon

The Food Stamp Program has made severe hunger rare in America. In the late 1960s, medical research found that American children suffered and died from diseases related to severe malnutrition. In 1979, after the Food Stamp Program became available nationwide, physicians discovered that severe malnutrition had become rare, a result they attributed to the Food Stamp Program. Today, the Food Stamp Program is the largest anti-hunger program in Oregon.

Food stamps help vulnerable Oregon residents and the economy

- Approximately 434,000 Oregonians – 11.7 percent of the people in Oregon – use food stamps to meet their nutritional needs every month.
- Oregon food stamp households receive, on average, \$1 dollar per person per meal in food stamp benefits. This modest amount is crucial to financially pressed families.
- The Food Stamp Program pumped \$463 million federal dollars into the Oregon economy last year, generating approximately \$852 million in new economic activity, benefiting farmers, grocers, and small businesses.
- About 82 percent of Oregon food stamp benefits go to households with children, many of them in working families. Most of the rest go to households with seniors or people with disabilities.

The recent decrease in hunger in Oregon is mostly due to the state's innovative efforts to better reach low-income working families

- Early this decade, Oregon had one of the highest hunger rates in the country. By expanding the use of food stamps the state's hunger rate significantly improved. Oregon used a federal policy tool – “categorical eligibility” – to expand its food stamp program. This policy allowed Oregon to reach more low-income, working families, particularly those with high child care or housing costs, and those with modest assets such as a reliable car for getting to work. Oregon's hunger rate is now near the middle among all the states.

Unmet need remains nationally and in Oregon

- While malnutrition is now rare in America, about 35 million Americans, including nearly one in five children, live in households that have difficulty affording food. An estimated 169,000 households in Oregon live with hunger or the threat of hunger, according to USDA. This includes low-income working families with children and senior citizens living on fixed incomes.
- Nationally, only 60 percent of those eligible for food stamps receive them. In Oregon, the participation rate is about 83 percent, one of the highest in the country. Despite Oregon's efforts, about 76,000 eligible Oregonians miss out on food stamps. More outreach and continued improvement in federal program design are needed.
- Increasing the share of eligible households that participate in the Food Stamp Program by just five percentage points would provide food stamps to an additional 26,000 low-income Oregonians, bring about \$18 million into our local economy, and result in about \$33 million in new economic activity in the state.