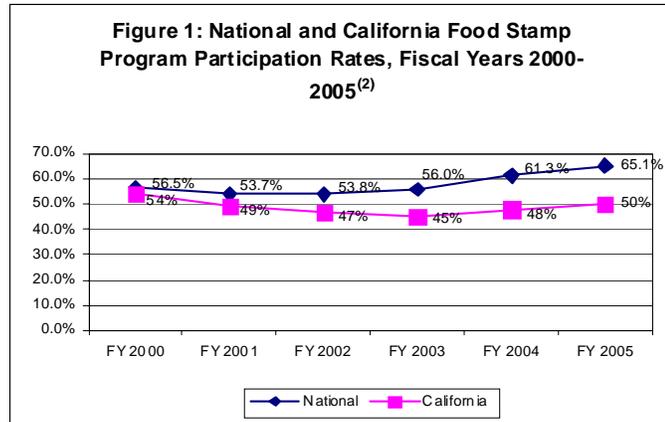


**California Department of Public Health  
California Food Stamp Program Access Improvement Plan  
October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009**

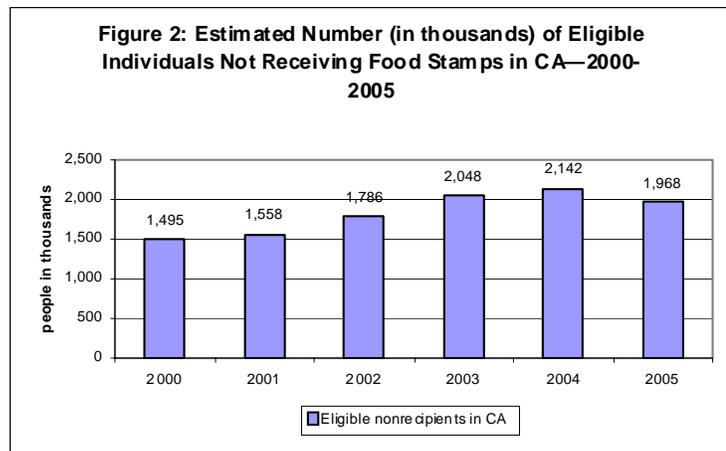
**2. Statement of Need**

The unfavorable trends in food insecurity, poverty and FSP participation at the state and county levels indicate the need for strengthened efforts to increase participation in California's Food Stamp Program (FSP). In addition, improved participation is needed to support food stamp nutrition education goals for healthier eating and, over the long term, reduce rates of overweight and obesity in low-income families with children.



**Trends in California's Food Stamp Program Participation**

USDA's most recent (2005) state-level FSP participation rates for California indicate only 50 percent of those eligible receive food stamps. While this is a slight improvement from the previous year when California ranked last in the nation, the gap between the California and national FSP participation rates has grown wider each year since 2000, when the difference between the national and California rates was only two percentage points (56 percent compared to 54 percent respectively) (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> However by 2005, there was a 15 percentage point difference with the rate nationwide estimated to be 65 percent of those FSP eligible.



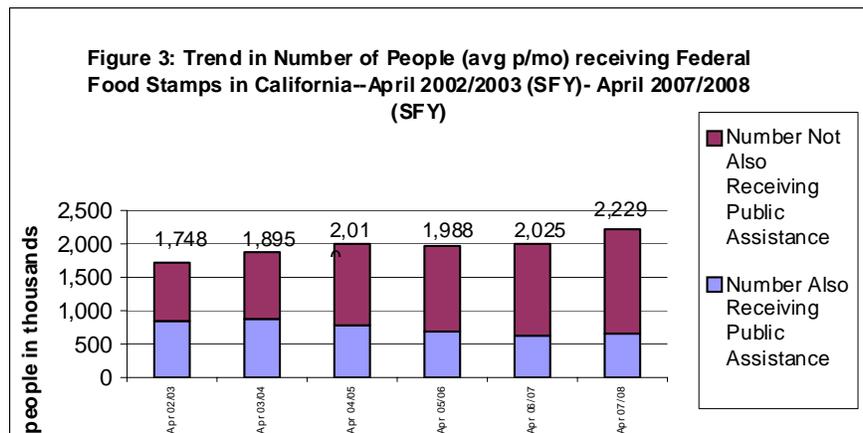
The state's relative performance for reaching the working poor was even worse with only 34 percent, compared to 51 percent nationwide. (The "working poor" are defined as people who are eligible for food stamps and live in a household in which a member earns money from a job.)

<sup>1</sup> Because estimates are based on fairly small household sample sizes, USDA advises that changes from year to year and comparisons between states need to be interpreted cautiously. For example, there is a 90 percent chance that California's true participation rate in 2005 falls within a range of 47-52 percent; e.g., the confidence interval.

<sup>2</sup> Sources: The national participation rate data is from Wolkwitz, Kari. "Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 1999 to 2005." Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (June 2007), <http://www.fns.usda.gov/OANE/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Trends1999-2005.pdf>. The California participation rate data is from the annual reports by Cunyningham, Karen, Castner, Laura, and Schirm, Allen. "Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates, USDA Food and Nutrition Service: released March 2005, October 2006, and October, 2007. For all years, the most recently released data were used. According to Wolkwitz (2007), no methodological changes affected interpretation of the FY2000-FY2005 national rates; however, it would need to be confirmed with Mathematica/USDA that no important methodological changes occurred in the state level calculations.

According to USDA estimates, just under 2 million eligible people in California are not receiving food stamp benefits. While some improvement was seen from 2004 to 2005, there was an increase of almost half a million people who were eligible but not participating over a six-year period (see Figure 2). The estimated number of eligible working poor not participating in FFY 2005 was almost 1.3 million.

**FSP Participation:** Since 2001, FSP participation has increased in California—a pattern which is seen nationwide. According to the most recently available California Department of Social Services (CDSS) data, the average monthly number of federal FSP recipients in California increased by 10.1 percent from April 2007 to April 2008. An important dynamic in California’s caseload has been the relative decline of FSP recipients who are receiving public assistance, as well as the increase of FSP recipients who are not (see Figure 3). From April 2003 to April 2008, the number of California’s FSP recipients also receiving public assistance declined by 22 percent, while the number **not** receiving public assistance increased by 43 percent. Prior to March 2003, more of the FSP recipients in California received public assistance than did not. However, by April 2007, more than twice as many FSP recipients were not receiving cash aid as were.



According to USDA’s Characteristics of Food Stamp Households, FFY 2006, FSP recipients in California are more likely (65 percent) to be children (under 18 years) and less likely (only 2 percent) to be “elderly” (60 years or older) than national figures (nationally, 49 percent and 8.7 percent, respectively). In addition, FSP households in California tend to be even poorer than national figures with only 5.8 percent in California having incomes above the poverty level compared to 12.7 percent nationally. California FSP recipients are also more likely to identify themselves as being Hispanic and less likely African American or White compared to national figures. In FFY 2005, 51 percent of the FSP recipients in California were Hispanic, 21 percent White, 18 percent African American and 10 percent “Other”.<sup>2</sup>

**Poverty and Food Insecurity in California:** In recent years, California’s poverty rate has been quite similar to the national average rate—in 2005, the national and California poverty rates were the same, estimated at 13.3 percent.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, California’s rate was 13.1 percent compared to 13.3 percent nationwide. However, because the federal poverty level does not allow adjustments for high cost of living and has other methodological limitations, many argue that there are far more persons functionally living in poverty than

<sup>2</sup> More recent estimates have considerable under-reporting. CDSS’s DFA358F Food Stamp Program Participants by Ethnic Group for July 2007 reports 27 percent Hispanic or Latino FSP household heads but race unknown for 26 percent.

<sup>3</sup> California and United States poverty rates from American Community Survey 2005 and 2006. (Accessed July 11, 2008. [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-\\_box\\_head\\_nbr=R1701&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_&-\\_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=US-30&-mt\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_R1704\\_US30&-CONTEXT=grt](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-_box_head_nbr=R1701&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-format=US-30&-mt_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_R1704_US30&-CONTEXT=grt)

these figures reflect.<sup>4</sup> A recent Public Policy Institute of California report applies a “conservative adjustment for costs, based on housing rents” and concludes “California has substantially higher poverty than the rest of the nation: 16.1 percent versus 12 percent...only Washington, D.C., and New York have higher poverty than California. Furthermore, Los Angeles, Monterey, and San Francisco counties have poverty rates of about 20 percent—in the range of the 10 highest poverty counties in the nation.”<sup>5</sup>

Many low-income families in California are food insecure, and higher food prices are exacerbating the situation: According to the 2005 *California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)*, 2.5 million low-income adults (< 200 percent FPL) in California could not always afford to put food on their table. Thirty percent of low-income adults were food insecure with 9.3 percent of classified as very low food-security (defined as “disruption in eating patterns and reduced food intake in the previous year”). For California households overall (all income brackets), USDA estimates food insecurity at 11.7 percent (average 2003-05) compared to the national rate of 11.4 percent<sup>6</sup>. In the California Women's Health Study, 71 percent of food stamp recipients reported some level of food insecurity, which presents a substantial barrier to increasing intake of fruit and vegetables.<sup>7</sup> One of the strongest factors associated with food insecurity in this population is not being able to make their food stamps last 30 days.

The problem of food insecurity appears to be increasing in California, as it is worldwide. The federal consumer price index for the cost of food rose 4.7 percent from March 2007, to March 2008. In May 2009, the California legislature held a hearing entitled “The Food Crisis” to examine the impact on low-income Californians of rapidly rising food costs in the context of the current economic downturn. A variety of experts gave testimony on the affects of increased hunger and hardship in the state. For example, food bank representatives described the increased pressure they faced to provide services to an increasing number of seniors, adults and children. CDSS Director John Wagner testified that California has seen a steady rise in food stamp households over the past several years with the caseload increasing ten percent from February, 2007, to February, 2008. Food insecurity and poverty trends indicate the likely heightened importance of FSP for ensuring the health and adequate diets for low-income Californians.

### County-Level Poverty, Food Insecurity and FSP Participation

**Table 1 provides information on county-level poverty, food insecurity and FSP participation including an estimated Program Access Index (PAI).<sup>8</sup> This**

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<sup>4</sup> Besharov, DJ and Germanis, P. (2004) Reconsidering the Federal Poverty Measure. University of Maryland School of Public Policy. Welfare Reform Academy.

<sup>5</sup> Reed Deborah. Moving Beyond the Federal Measure. California Counts Population Trends and Profiles. Volume 7 Number 4 • May 2006 Public Policy Institute of California (Accessed July 2006 [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/CC\\_506DRCC.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/CC_506DRCC.pdf))

<sup>6</sup> Nord, M. Andrews, M. and Carlson, S. (2007) Household Food Insecurity in the United States, 2006. USDA Economic Research Service Economic Research Report Number 49.

<sup>7</sup> Kaiser, L., Baumrind, N., and Dumbauld, S. *Who is food-insecure in California? Findings from the California Women's Health Survey, 2004* Public Health Nutrition, Volume 10, Issue 06, June 2007.

<sup>8</sup> PAI is included because FSP participation rates (% of eligible people receiving food stamps) are not available at the county level. Source: County level PAI estimates from Abascal (2008) "Measuring County Food Stamp Performance Using the Program Access Index to Analyze California's 58 Counties" California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA). <http://www.cfpa.net/foodstamps/PAI%20Final.pdf> "The Program Access Index (PAI) is one of the measures USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) uses to assess states' performance in the administration of the Food Stamp Program. The PAI is simply the ratio of the average number of individuals participating in the Food Stamp Program to the number of individuals income-eligible to participate in each state for a particular calendar year. Because income is the only eligibility measure considered in the index, the PAI can best be seen as a measure of the extent to which low-income people are participating in the Food Stamp Program. While PAI is an incomplete measure, USDA uses PAI to evaluate and reward food stamp performance, notably the high performance bonuses

**information is useful for considering counties where outreach activities might be expanded or prioritized. (Note the 27 counties in bold that have California Food Stamp Program Access Improvement Plan (AIP) subcontractors conducting FSP outreach).**

Unmet needs include:

AIP subcontractors will also be providing services in two of the five counties with the highest rates of food insecurity among low income adults (Fresno and Merced) but not Kings, Napa and Sutter.

AIP subcontractors are providing outreach services in two of the five counties with the lowest PAI (San Luis Obispo and San Mateo) but not Marin, Mono, and Napa. AIP subcontractors will be providing outreach services in all but one (Del Norte) of the five counties with the highest overall rates of poverty, and, specifically, poverty among children (Fresno, Imperial, Kern and Tulare) but, again, not Del Norte.

While the relatively poor performance for these six counties is noteworthy, they are relatively small counties with a total estimated 62,000 potentially eligible persons (income <130 percent FPL and not receiving food stamps). These absolute figures of “potentially eligible persons” are rough estimates since eligibility factors, such as immigration status and asset ownership, are not factored into the index.

It is useful to identify counties having the greatest number of estimated eligible people not served in the state. From this perspective, the high need counties for FSP outreach are Los Angeles (37.5 percent), Orange (7.6 percent), and San Diego (8.6 percent). These three counties are home to over 50 percent of the people statewide estimated to have incomes less than 130 percent FPL but not receiving food stamps. Orange and San Diego counties are especially notable. While respectively, they are home to 3.9 and 4.5 percent of California’s FSP participants, almost twice as many of the state’s income eligible non-participants live in these two counties— 8.6 percent in Orange County and 7.6 percent in San Diego County.

Humboldt, Imperial and San Diego have been selected as priority counties that will receive additional AIP funding based on county need and the opportunity for capacity building for the three CAFB subcontractors operating in these counties. Imperial County has the highest child poverty rate in California and a food bank with very strong, bilingual-bicultural food stamp outreach staff and activities, but they currently have very little state share funding. Humboldt ranks high in terms of both overall and child poverty. Currently, the AIP sub-contractor is the only community-based organization from which the county will currently accept FSP applications. As described above, San Diego is a high need county. As described in subsequent sections of the plan, the California Association of Food Banks has established a network of AIP subcontractors to amplify FSP outreach activities in this county.

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established in the 2002 Farm Bill.” CFPA makes two modifications to the methodology employed by USDA: 1) they had to adjust for limited income data for California’s smaller counties and 2) they make adjustments to USDA’s SSI exclusion step.