
April 19, 2007

FACTS ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

African Americans Benefit Disproportionately from the Food Stamp Program

- One in three food stamp households is headed by an African American. More than a third of food stamp benefits — over \$10 billion per year — are issued to African-Americans. (According to Census data, African Americans make up about 12 percent of the U.S. population.)
- Nearly 9 million African Americans receive food stamps each month. This represents a quarter of the African American population.
- A typical African American family on the Food Stamp Program has income (not including food stamps) at 56 percent of the poverty line (compared to 64 percent for all food stamp households). For a family of three, 56 percent of the poverty line corresponds to a monthly income of \$775, or an annual income of \$9,300.
- Food stamps constitute 26 percent of total monthly income for a typical African American family that participates in the Food Stamp Program.
- On average, African American families on the Food Stamp Program received \$216 in food stamps each month in fiscal year 2005, or over \$2,500 per year.
- African Americans who qualify for food stamps are more likely to participate than other groups (73 percent participation rate, compared to 60 percent overall). Nonetheless, according to USDA, almost 3 million African Americans who are *eligible* for food stamps are missing out on benefits.

Food Insecurity and Poverty Remain High Among African Americans

- More than one in five African American households (22.4 percent) and more than one in four African-American families with children (27.4 percent) have difficulty affording adequate food (known as “food insecurity” in USDA research). This is almost three times the share for white, non-Hispanic households.¹

¹ Household Food Security in the United States, 2005,” USDA, 2006.

- The current economic expansion has not reached low-income African Americans. Poverty among African Americans has increased from 22.7 percent in 2001 to 24.7 percent in 2005, the most recent year for which Census data on income and poverty are available.
- In addition, the recovery that began in 2001 has not increased real earnings at the lower end of the income scale. For African American workers median hourly wages have not increased in inflation adjusted terms from 2001 through 2005.

1996 Welfare Law Food Stamp Provisions Contained Deep Cuts for African Americans that Remain in Effect

- In 2008, a typical African American working parent with two children will receive about \$37 less in food stamps each month than they would have without the 1996 welfare law's across-the-board benefit cuts. The cuts are deepening with each passing year. By 2017 the benefit cuts will cost a typical working parent of two almost \$650 a year, the equivalent of more than one and a half months' worth of food stamps each year.
- One of the harshest provisions of the 1996 welfare bill limited food stamps for unemployed childless adults to 3 months out of each 36-month period even when they are willing to work. A disproportionate share of the people cut off food stamps because of this provision are African American (46 percent, compared to 35 percent of the overall food stamp population, according to USDA estimates).

African American Farmers Are Much Less Likely to Receive Farm Subsidies

- According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, fewer than one in five African American farmers (18 percent) receive a federal farm subsidy, only about half the percentage of white farmers (34 percent). Furthermore, the census found that there are fewer than 2 farms run by African Americans for every 100 farms run by a white farmer.