

Program Access Index 2013

Measuring CalFresh Utilization by County

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California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.

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For more information about CFPA, please visit <http://www.cfpa.net>.

CFPA's Program Access Index is the only analysis of county-specific CalFresh utilization in California. CFPA would like to continue producing this publication annually. If you would like to support this work, please contact George Manalo-LeClair, CFPA's Executive Director, at 510.433.1122 ext. 103 or george@cfpa.net.

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CFPA's county Program Access Index (PAI) draws on the methodology developed for the United States Department of Agriculture's state PAI. We appreciate the effort and expertise that is dedicated to producing that measure.

Special thanks to Caroline Danielson of The Public Policy Institute of California for providing her expertise in developing the methodological changes used to calculate CFPA's county Program Access Index this year.

Table of Contents

- The Program Access Index..... 5**
- Comparing the PAI and State Participation Rates..... 6**
 - Determining CalFresh Eligibility 6
 - Timeliness of Available Data 6
- Interpreting the PAI..... 6**
 - Assessing the Impact of County Administration 6
 - Ranking 7
 - Trends 7
- PAI Tables..... 7**
 - PAI for All Counties: Listed Alphabetically 8
 - PAI for All Counties: Listed by Rank 9
- Methodology..... 10**
 - Methodology for Tables 1 and 2 10
- Appendix A..... 14**
- References..... 15**

The Program Access Index

The Program Access Index (PAI) estimates CalFreshⁱ utilization among low-income individuals. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produces an annual state-by-state PAI.ⁱⁱ The PAI provided in this report is a county-level analysis modeled on the USDA methodology.

This year's PAI analysis incorporates county-specific estimates of SSI recipients who have incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold. For details see page 9.

As shown in the general formula below, the county-level PAI estimates CalFresh

Change in Methodology

utilization among individuals who meet three CalFresh eligibility criteria: (1) income below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold, (2) no participation in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and (3) no receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) if income is below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold.

$$PAI = \frac{(\text{CalFresh Participants}) - (\text{Disaster CalFresh Program Participants})}{(\text{Individuals with Income} < 125\% \text{ of poverty}) - (\text{FDPIR Participants}) - (\text{SSI Recipients with Income} < 125\% \text{ of poverty})}$$

The PAI incorporates only three CalFresh eligibility criteria. Therefore, it is not a participation rate that measures CalFresh participation among fully-eligible individuals. However, the PAI can help illuminate county-level differences in CalFresh utilization by comparing the number of individuals who meet select CalFresh eligibility criteria and the number of individuals who actually receive CalFresh benefits.

USDA uses its state-level PAI as one measure to “reward States for high performance in the administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).”ⁱⁱⁱ Within California, CalFresh administrative policies and practices vary by county. The PAI cannot be used as a comprehensive measure to evaluate administrative performance. However, administrative policies and practices do impact the number of CalFresh participants. Therefore, CalFresh administrative policies and practices do impact one of the primary factors used to calculate the PAI.

Comparing the PAI and State Participation Rates

USDA releases annual SNAP “participation rates” for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These participation rates may be the best available estimates of SNAP utilization among eligible individuals. However, the rates are calculated as statewide measures and have limited relevance at the county level, particularly in a state as diverse as California. USDA does not calculate county-level participation rates.

Determining CalFresh Eligibility

USDA’s state participation rates are complex estimates of SNAP/CalFresh participation among eligible individuals. The rates take into account several factors affecting CalFresh eligibility and utilization. In comparison, the PAI takes into account three CalFresh eligibility criteria: income, FDPIR participation, and SSI status.

Timeliness of Available Data

State participation rates for any given year are typically released two to three years following. For instance, USDA’s state participation rates for 2012 were released during February of 2015.^{iv} In comparison, the PAI is typically calculated within one year. (Note: USDA released the 2013 state-level PAI in January 2015, 13 months after the year in question.)

Interpreting the PAI

The county-level PAI compares two population estimates: the number of individuals in each county who receive CalFresh benefits and the number of individuals in each county who meet three CalFresh eligibility criteria (income below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold, no participation in FDPIR, and no receipt of SSI for individuals with income below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold).

Assessing the Impact of County Administration

Because CalFresh policies and practices vary among California counties, county-level measures that assess the extent to which administrators reach and serve the eligible population are critical. The PAI is one such measure because CalFresh administration affects a central component of the PAI calculation: the number of individuals receiving CalFresh benefits. On its own, the PAI is not a comprehensive tool for evaluating counties’ administration of CalFresh. Advocates and policymakers should look to

establish the use of additional indicators in assessing CalFresh administrative performance.

Ranking

The PAI tables in this report include county rankings. The county ranked number one has the highest estimated CalFresh utilization relative to the total number of individuals who meet the three eligibly criteria previously discussed.

Trends

The county-level PAI is not designed to definitively establish trends over time. There are two primary challenges with using the PAI to establish trends:

1. Methodological approaches may change over time, altering the comparability of PAI estimates calculated before and after each change. For example, this 2013 CFPA PAI incorporates county-specific estimates of SSI recipients with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty threshold. The 2012 CFPA PAI employed a different methodology, subtracting all SSI recipients from the PAI denominator.
2. Income data from the American Community Survey are used to calculate the PAI. These data have a given level of precision expressed as a margin of error. Margins of error can make it difficult to distinguish true trends from variations inherent to the methods used for collecting and analyzing survey data.

PAI Tables

This section contains two tables. Table 1 shows the PAI for all California counties listed alphabetically. Table 2 shows the PAI for all California counties listed by rank. When applied to statewide data, the methodology used to generate Tables 1 and 2 yields a PAI of 0.580 for California.

PAI for All Counties: Listed Alphabetically

Table 1

County	PAI	Rank
Alameda	0.566	32
Alpine	0.718	11
Amador	0.652	22
Butte	0.582	29
Calaveras	0.809	2
Colusa	0.420	49
Contra Costa	0.485	42
Del Norte	0.921	1
El Dorado ¹	0.585	28
Fresno	0.785	5
Glenn	0.526	37
Humboldt	0.537	33
Imperial	0.771	6
Inyo	0.686	14
Kern	0.623	24
Kings	0.680	16
Lake ¹	0.585	27
Lassen	0.691	13
Los Angeles	0.530	34
Madera	0.661	19
Marin	0.382	55
Mariposa	0.590	26
Mendocino	0.683	15
Merced	0.720	10
Modoc	0.371	56
Mono	0.301	58
Monterey	0.529	35
Napa	0.365	57
Nevada	0.513	38

County	PAI	Rank
Orange	0.486	41
Placer	0.445	48
Plumas	0.460	46
Riverside	0.615	25
Sacramento	0.721	9
San Benito	0.658	21
San Bernardino	0.807	3
San Diego	0.476	44
San Francisco	0.417	50
San Joaquin	0.754	7
San Luis Obispo	0.400	51
San Mateo	0.392	52
Santa Barbara ²	0.387	54
Santa Clara	0.475	45
Santa Cruz	0.496	39
Shasta	0.662	18
Sierra	0.454	47
Siskiyou	0.660	20
Solano	0.669	17
Sonoma	0.477	43
Stanislaus	0.728	8
Sutter	0.582	30
Tehama	0.646	23
Trinity	0.489	40
Tulare	0.795	4
Tuolumne	0.527	36
Ventura	0.581	31
Yolo ²	0.387	53
Yuba	0.715	12

¹⁻² The 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, Lake County's PAI is 0.5851 and El Dorado County's PAI is 0.5849. Thus, their respective ranks are 27 and 28. Similarly, Yolo County's PAI is 0.3866 and Santa Barbara County's PAI is 0.3865.

PAI for All Counties: Listed by Rank
Table 2

County	PAI	Rank
Del Norte	0.921	1
Calaveras	0.809	2
San Bernardino	0.807	3
Tulare	0.795	4
Fresno	0.785	5
Imperial	0.771	6
San Joaquin	0.754	7
Stanislaus	0.728	8
Sacramento	0.721	9
Merced	0.720	10
Alpine	0.718	11
Yuba	0.715	12
Lassen	0.691	13
Inyo	0.686	14
Mendocino	0.683	15
Kings	0.680	16
Solano	0.669	17
Shasta	0.662	18
Madera	0.661	19
Siskiyou	0.660	20
San Benito	0.658	21
Amador	0.652	22
Tehama	0.646	23
Kern	0.623	24
Riverside	0.615	25
Mariposa	0.590	26
Lake ¹	0.585	27
El Dorado ¹	0.585	28
Butte	0.582	29

County	PAI	Rank
Sutter	0.582	30
Ventura	0.581	31
Alameda	0.566	32
Humboldt	0.537	33
Los Angeles	0.530	34
Monterey	0.529	35
Tuolumne	0.527	36
Glenn	0.526	37
Nevada	0.513	38
Santa Cruz	0.496	39
Trinity	0.489	40
Orange	0.486	41
Contra Costa	0.485	42
Sonoma	0.477	43
San Diego	0.476	44
Santa Clara	0.475	45
Plumas	0.460	46
Sierra	0.454	47
Placer	0.445	48
Colusa	0.420	49
San Francisco	0.417	50
San Luis Obispo	0.400	51
San Mateo	0.392	52
Yolo ²	0.387	53
Santa Barbara ²	0.387	54
Marin	0.382	55
Modoc	0.371	56
Napa	0.365	57
Mono	0.301	58

¹⁻² The 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, Lake County's PAI is 0.5851 and El Dorado County's PAI is 0.5849. Thus, their respective ranks are 27 and 28. Similarly, Yolo County's PAI is 0.3866 and Santa Barbara County's PAI is 0.3865.

Methodology

This methodology details the calculations used for the PAI shown in Tables 1 and 2. Making adaptations for county-level data where appropriate, this methodology largely follows the USDA methodology^v used to calculate the 2013 state-level PAI. As detailed in Step 7 below, this methodology differs from that used in previous iterations of CFPA’s PAI analysis with respect to the treatment of SSI data.

Methodology for Tables 1 and 2

Step 1: Determine the annual count of CalFresh participants for the 2013 calendar year by summing monthly participation counts from January 2013 through December 2013.

Sum of Monthly Participation from January through December = Annual Count of CalFresh Participants

Data Source: CalFresh participation data for the state of California and all California counties are available at: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/PG352.htm>.

Step 2: Determine the number of individuals who received Disaster CalFresh benefits (disaster assistance) during the 2013 calendar year.

Data Source: Disaster CalFresh participation data were provided by the California Department of Social Services.

Note: There were no Disaster CalFresh benefits distributed in any California counties for the 2013 calendar year.

Step 3: Calculate the adjusted number of annual CalFresh participants by subtracting Step 2 from Step 1.

Annual Count of CalFresh Participants – Number of Disaster CalFresh Recipients = Adjusted Annual Count of CalFresh Participants

Step 4: Calculate the adjusted number of average monthly CalFresh participants for the 2013 calendar year by dividing Step 3 by 12.

Adjusted Annual Count of CalFresh Participants ÷ 12 months = Adjusted Number of Average Monthly CalFresh Participants

Step 5: Determine the number of individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold. Eligibility criteria for CalFresh allow participants to have incomes up to 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG). However, county-level estimates are not available for the number of individuals with incomes below 130 percent of FPG. Therefore, having an income below 125 percent of the poverty threshold is used as a proxy for CalFresh income eligibility. The use of this proxy may underestimate the number of individuals who are income-eligible for CalFresh.

Data Source: Five year estimates of the number of individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold are available from American Fact Finder at: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/main.html>. (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2009-13, Table C17002)

Note: The five-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates incorporate the most recently available data and data from the four previous years. ACS also produces one-year and three-year estimates for some California counties. However, only the 5-year estimates are available for all California counties. In order to ensure PAI comparability across all counties, 5-year estimates of income are used in this analysis. Again, these estimates include but are not limited to the most recently available data from ACS.

Step 6: Determine the average monthly participation for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) during the 2013 calendar year.

Data Source: Average monthly FDPIR participation data were obtained from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office. (See Appendix A.)

Data provided by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office do not identify the county of residence for each FDPIR participant. In December 2007/January 2008, FDPIR program directors estimated the number of participants residing in each county. Six program directors were able to update these estimates in early 2014. Estimates were applied to current participation data to approximate the number of 2013 FDPIR participants in each county.

Note: By federal law, FDPIR participants are categorically ineligible to receive CalFresh benefits. However, FDPIR and CalFresh have the same income eligibility guidelines. Consequently, if income were the only measure of eligibility, FDPIR participants would qualify for CalFresh benefits.

Step 7: Determine the number of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) participants in December 2013 with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold.

7a. Use the 2013 ACS to calculate the percentage of SSI recipients in each county or county group with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold. In the 2013 ACS, 35 counties are identified individually and 23 counties are combined into seven groups: (1) Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne; (2) Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, and Trinity; (3) Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, and Plumas; (4) Lake and Mendocino; (5) Monterey and San Benito; (6) Nevada and Sierra; and (7) Sutter and Yuba.

7b. Identify the total number of SSI recipients in a given county using 2013 caseload data from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

7c. Multiply a county's total number of SSI recipients by the county's percentage of SSI recipients with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold.

The ACS and SSA data sources are used together to improve the accuracy of the estimates. Estimates from the ACS are subject to both sampling error and to possible misreporting of SSI receipt by survey respondents.

SSI caseload data is publicly available from the Social Security Administration for the month of December for any given year.

Percent of County's SSI Recipients with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty x Number of SSI Recipients per County = Number of SSI Participants with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty

Data Source:

- California SSI data for December 2013 (Table – 3) is available at: http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_sc/2013/index.html
- 2013 ACS data is available at: <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

Note: In California, SSI recipients are categorically ineligible to participate in CalFresh. Therefore, SSI recipients with incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold should be excluded from estimates of individuals who are eligible for CalFresh benefits. SSI recipients with higher incomes are necessarily excluded from estimates of CalFresh eligibility because of the CalFresh income criteria.

Step 8: Calculate the adjusted number of individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold by subtracting Steps 6 and 7 from Step 5.

Individuals with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty - Average Monthly FDPIR Participation - SSI Participants with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty = Adjusted Number Of Individuals With Incomes Below 125% of Poverty

Step 9: Calculate the Program Access Index for 2013 by dividing Step 4 by Step 8.

Adjusted Number of Average Monthly CalFresh Participants for 2013 ÷ Adjusted Number of Individuals with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty = County PAI

Step 10: Rank order counties by PAI. The county ranked number one has the highest PAI score. That is, the county ranked number one has the highest estimated CalFresh utilization relative to the total number of individuals with incomes below 125% of the poverty threshold who do not participate in FDPIR or receive SSI.

Appendix A

Average monthly FDPIR participation data for were obtained from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office. These data are accurate as of January 2015.

Indian Tribal Organizations Administering FDPIR within CA	Average Monthly Participation: Calendar Year 2013	Estimated Percent of FDPIR Participants by County Affiliation: Calendar Year 2013
Fort Mojave Food Distribution	211	San Bernardino 100%
Hoopa Food Distribution Program	863	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butte 8.0% • Humboldt 51.3% • Lassen 4.3% • Plumas 1.8% • Shasta 8.4% • Siskiyou 22.4% • Sutter 0.2% • Tehema 1.9% • Trinity 0.6%, Yuba 1.0%
Riverside-San Bernardino Indian Health, Inc.	653	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverside 89.7% • San Bernardino 10.3%
Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association	633	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverside 1.4% • San Diego 98.6%
Tule River Food Distribution Program	357	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tulare 100%
Sherwood Valley Food Program	2,411	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colusa 2.2% • Glenn 4.2% • Lake 21.0% • Mendocino 61.3% • Sonoma 11.3%
Yurok Food Distribution Program	429	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Del Norte 70% • Humboldt 30%
Total	5,557	N/A

References

United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Calculating the SNAP Program Access Index: A Step-by-Step Guide*, January 2015, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2013.pdf>

Cunyngham, Karen. United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Participation Rates in 2012*, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2012.pdf>

ⁱ The nutrition assistance program known federally as “SNAP” (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is known as “CalFresh” in California.

ⁱⁱ United State Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Calculating the SNAP Program Access Index: A Step-by-Step Guide*, January 2015, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2013.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Cunyngham, Karen. United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Participation Rates in 2012*, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2012.pdf>

^v The USDA methodology is available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2013.pdf>.

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