

Program Access Index 2014

Measuring CalFresh Utilization by County

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California Food Policy Advocates

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 independent 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.

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The Program Access Index

The Program Access Index (PAI) estimates CalFresh¹ utilization among low-income individuals. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produces an annual state-by-state PAI.ⁱ The PAI provided in this report is a county-level analysis modeled on the USDA methodology with one significant difference: this PAI incorporates county-specific estimates of SSI recipients who have incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold. For methodological details see page 11.

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

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

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).”ⁱⁱ 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.

¹ The nutrition assistance program known federally as “SNAP” (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is known as “CalFresh” in California.

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 2013 were released during February of 2016.ⁱⁱⁱ In comparison, the PAI is typically calculated within one year. (Note: USDA released the 2014 state-level PAI in February 2016, 14 months after the year in question.)²

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

² This 2014 PAI release is later than previous years. CFPA anticipates releasing the 2015 PAI within the previous PAI release timeframe (February-March 2017).

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 eligible 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, the 2013 and 2014 CFPA PAI incorporate 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 0.583 for California.***

2014 PAI for All Counties: Listed Alphabetically

Table 1

County	PAI	Rank
Alameda	0.532	38
Alpine	0.831	3
Amador	0.656	20
Butte	0.557	33
Calaveras	0.780	6
Colusa	0.366	58
Contra Costa ¹	0.512	42
Del Norte	0.931	1
El Dorado	0.537	37
Fresno	0.754	7
Glenn	0.522	40
Humboldt	0.596	31
Imperial	0.842	2
Inyo	0.671	18
Kern	0.624	24
Kings ²	0.637	22
Lake	0.621	25
Lassen	0.751	8
Los Angeles	0.527	39
Madera	0.674	16
Marin	0.387	55
Mariposa ²	0.637	21
Mendocino	0.661	19
Merced	0.719	12
Modoc	0.460	48
Mono	0.461	47
Monterey	0.542	36
Napa	0.377	57
Nevada	0.547	35

County	PAI	Rank
Orange ¹	0.512	41
Placer	0.447	49
Plumas	0.506	43
Riverside	0.600	30
Sacramento	0.712	13
San Benito	0.636	23
San Bernardino	0.823	4
San Diego	0.494	45
San Francisco	0.429	51
San Joaquin	0.733	9
San Luis Obispo	0.378	56
San Mateo	0.417	52
Santa Barbara	0.398	53
Santa Clara	0.489	46
Santa Cruz	0.498	44
Shasta	0.672	17
Sierra	0.602	29
Siskiyou	0.614	28
Solano	0.686	15
Sonoma	0.443	50
Stanislaus	0.728	10
Sutter	0.615	27
Tehama	0.706	14
Trinity	0.579	32
Tulare	0.821	5
Tuolumne	0.547	34
Ventura	0.616	26
Yolo	0.395	54
Yuba	0.722	11

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, Orange County's PAI is 0.5116 and Contra Costa County's PAI is 0.5115. Thus, their respective ranks are 41 and 42. Similarly, Mariposa County's PAI is 0.6373 and Kings County's PAI is 0.6369.

2014 PAI for All Counties: Listed by Rank
Table 2

County	PAI	Rank
Del Norte	0.931	1
Imperial	0.842	2
Alpine	0.831	3
San Bernardino	0.823	4
Tulare	0.821	5
Calaveras	0.780	6
Fresno	0.754	7
Lassen	0.751	8
San Joaquin	0.733	9
Stanislaus	0.728	10
Yuba	0.722	11
Merced	0.719	12
Sacramento	0.712	13
Tehama	0.706	14
Solano	0.686	15
Madera	0.674	16
Shasta	0.672	17
Inyo	0.671	18
Mendocino	0.661	19
Amador	0.656	20
Mariposa ²	0.637	21
Kings ²	0.637	22
San Benito	0.636	23
Kern	0.624	24
Lake	0.621	25
Ventura	0.616	26
Sutter	0.615	27
Siskiyou	0.614	28
Sierra	0.602	29

County	PAI	Rank
Riverside	0.600	30
Humboldt	0.596	31
Trinity	0.579	32
Butte	0.557	33
Tuolumne	0.547	34
Nevada	0.547	35
Monterey	0.542	36
El Dorado	0.537	37
Alameda	0.532	38
Los Angeles	0.527	39
Glenn	0.522	40
Orange ¹	0.512	41
Contra Costa ¹	0.512	42
Plumas	0.506	43
Santa Cruz	0.498	44
San Diego	0.494	45
Santa Clara	0.489	46
Mono	0.461	47
Modoc	0.460	48
Placer	0.447	49
Sonoma	0.443	50
San Francisco	0.429	51
San Mateo	0.417	52
Santa Barbara	0.398	53
Yolo	0.395	54
Marin	0.387	55
San Luis Obispo	0.378	56
Napa	0.377	57
Colusa	0.366	58

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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 methodology³ used to calculate the 2014 state-level PAI. As detailed in Step 7 below, this methodology differs with respect to the treatment of SSI data from that used in iterations of CFPA’s PAI analysis published before 2015.

Methodology for Tables 1 and 2

Step 1: Determine the annual count of CalFresh participants for the 2014 calendar year by summing monthly participation counts from January 2014 through December 2014.

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 2014 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 2014 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 2014 calendar year by dividing Step 3 by 12.

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

³ The USDA methodology is available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2014.pdf>.

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, 2010-14, 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 2014 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 2015 for the 2013 program year and three were able to update these estimates in early 2016 for the 2014 program year. Estimates were then applied to current participation data to approximate the number of 2014 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 2014 with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold.

7a. Use the 2014 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 2014 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 2014 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 2014 (Table – 3) is available at: http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_sc/2014/index.html
- 2014 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 2014 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 2016.

Indian Tribal Organizations Administering FDPIR within CA	Average Monthly Participation: Calendar Year 2014	Estimated Percent of FDPIR Participants by County Affiliation: Calendar Year 2014
Fort Mojave Food Distribution	241	San Bernardino 100%
Hoopa Food Distribution Program	970	<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% • Tehama 1.9% • Trinity 0.6% • Yuba 1.0%
Riverside-San Bernardino Indian Health, Inc.	578	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverside 97.6% • San Bernardino 2.4%
Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association	564	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riverside 1.8% • San Diego 98.2%
Tule River Food Distribution Program	355	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresno 37.0% • Kern 7.9% • Kings 1.5% • Madera 18.0% • Tulare 17.6% • Tuolumne 18.0%
Sherwood Valley Food Program	2,299	<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	410	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Del Norte 70% • Humboldt 30%
Total	5,417	N/A

References

ⁱ United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Calculating the SNAP Program Access Index: A Step-by-Step Guide*, February 2016, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2014.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Cunyningham, Karen. United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Participation Rates in 2013*, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2013.pdf>

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