American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

We ask about Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to understand and forecast participation in food assistance programs. In 2008, the food stamp program was renamed SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), but the question uses both program names to minimize respondent confusion.

The question as it appeared on the 2016 ACS paper questionnaire. This topic was introduced to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required to streamline administration of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program by replacing administrative paperwork with ACS estimates of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals
- Used to support a national education program focused on the dissemination of the results of food and human nutrition education research.
- Used in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to calculate the annual Program Access Index (PAI), a measure used to award bonuses to States for strong performance in SNAP administration.
- Used in determining eligibility for assistance programs.
- Used in assessing poverty.
- Used to measure the performance of other programs such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Examples of Other Uses
State and local agencies use these statistics to assess state food assistance needs and performance, participation rates for eligible families and individuals, and to determine gaps in services and programs. Faith-based and other nonprofit organizations use information about food assistance needs to determine where food banks, food kitchens, and other programs could be beneficial, and how the needs of their can be met with additional resources and services.