

# **Final Report**

Participation of Latino/Hispanic Population in the  
Food Stamp Program in the South.

Safdar Muhammad<sup>1</sup> and Fisseha Tegegne  
Institute of Agricultural and Environmental Research  
Tennessee State University  
Nashville, TN

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding PI, IAgER, Tennessee State University, Box 9610, 3500 John A. Merritt Blvd., Nashville, TN 37209-1561. Tel (615) 963-5824. Fax (615) 963-1557. Email: [smuhammad@tnstate.edu](mailto:smuhammad@tnstate.edu)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Hispanic population is growing rapidly in the U.S. generally and in the southern states particularly. This rapidly growing population is characterized by high poverty rates among children and elderly population compared to other races. The Hispanic population is less educated, characterized by low income, lack English language proficiency and has need for public assistance to support their families. The majority of the population is not aware of the FSP and their eligibility to participate in the program. In Tennessee, Hispanic participation and households are increasing rapidly especially in the metro counties. The increase in participation is about three times that of the total population. Participation of Hispanic children in the program was much higher than adults.

Lack of English proficiency requires special effort and assistance to serve the growing Hispanic population. To accommodate this growing population, the food stamp program offices will need staff with Spanish language skills. Training programs for state and local officials will be helpful to better serve the Hispanic population. It is important to create trust and comfort among food stamp staff and Hispanics to enhance their participation. Specially designed outreach programs to target low income Hispanic families especially those with children will also help to increase participation. Outreach material should be available in Spanish language in effective and efficient way. The results showed that religious organizations can play important role in providing information about the program. Collaboration between the food stamp offices and local ethnic and religious organizations will help to increase participation of the eligible Hispanic population. Some of the collaboration activities can include training local people to organize workshops to test eligibility and provide information/ resources at public and private charity meetings. More staff with Spanish language skills and translated material will also enhance their participation. The other measures to increase participation will be food stamp application process should be less complicated, reduce waiting time and provide more friendly staff. It will be important for the food stamp program to be prepared to serve a rapid growing Hispanic population.

Title: Participation of Latino/Hispanic Population in the Food Stamp Program  
(FSP) in the South.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Latino/Hispanic population which is growing rapidly in the U.S. generally and the southern region particularly is characterized by high poverty rate and poor living conditions especially among those with children. According to the Census Bureau, the total Hispanic population in the U.S. was 39.9 millions in 2003, compared to 22.3 millions in 1990. The Hispanic population increased by 78.49% during 1990-2003. The Latino/Hispanic population also increased with significant rate (13.01%) in the short period of time, 2000-2003. The total Hispanic population in the southern states is shown in Table 1. The Hispanic population increased more in the south (97.45%) compared to U.S. (78.49%) during 1990-2003.

The Hispanic population in the U.S. had traditionally been concentrated in specific areas of the country. But a study by Saenz et al., 2003 showed that percentage change in the Latino/ Hispanic in the southern region was ranked second after the western region during 1990-2000. The percentage change was 117.2% in the West and 102.6 percent in the South. Florida and Texas contribute a large Hispanic population (82%) in this region but other states showed significant increased in recent years. The rapid growing states in the south are North Carolina (508%), Arkansas (405%), Georgia (396%), Tennessee (345%) and South Carolina (274%) during 1990-2003. Majority of the Hispanic population lives in the larger metropolitan areas in Tennessee. According to Census data, Hispanic population in the Davidson and Shelby counties was 31,976 and 26,434 respectively. These two counties represent 40% of total Hispanic population in the state (146,000). The Census data showed that during 2000-03, Hispanic population

increased faster in the adjacent to metro counties (20.67%) compared to metro (17.57%) and non-metro counties (9.08%) in Tennessee.

A report by the Census Bureau (2000) highlighted some of the key economic characteristics of the Hispanic population in the U.S. According to the report, Hispanic face high unemployment rate (6.8%), the majority live below the poverty level (22.8%), are less educated (43% with less than high school), have larger household size (30.6% with five or more people), and few (23.3%) have annual earning of \$35,000 or more. Another study (Arnold et al. 2001) also provides information and characteristics of food stamp recipients in California. Some of the main findings of this report were that majority of food stamp recipients are children (66%), non-citizen (12%) and Hispanic (44%).

The Latino/Hispanic group contributes a significant share to the total immigrant population in the U.S. According to the INS (2004), total immigrants admitted into the U.S. in 2003 were 705,827. The majority of these immigrants were from Mexico (16.4%). Two southern states, Florida and Texas, ranked in the top four primary destination states for legal immigrants behind California and New York.

A study by Capps (2001) shows that children of immigrant families face more hardship in three basic needs areas of food, housing and healthcare compared to U.S. natives. The same study also suggests that one-fourth of all children born to immigrants live in poor families, compared to 16% for natives. Twenty-three percent of all poor children in the US are either first or second-generation immigrants. The immigration status of parents and restrictions introduced by the 1996 welfare reforms that targeted non-citizens also affects participation of eligible children who are US citizens in the welfare program (Fix and Zimmermann 1999). Recent restoration of food stamps

benefits to legal immigrants will allow more Hispanics to participate in the FSP and can have significant impact especially in the south.

The economic conditions and standard of living of Hispanic families are much lower than non-Hispanic families in the U.S. A large number of Hispanics are living below the poverty level, which is much higher than that of total U.S. population. The poverty rate among Hispanics was 22.5% compared to 12.5% for all U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The poverty rate for Hispanic children (under 18 years) is 29.7%, this means that about one in three Hispanic child is living below the poverty level.

The comparison of the poverty rate among Hispanic and total population is shown in Figure 1. The data indicate that poverty among Hispanic was always higher than total population during 1972 to 2003. The highest poverty rate was 15.2% for all population in 1983 but lowest poverty rate for Hispanic population was 21.4% in 2001 with the highest rate of 30.7% in 1994. Similarly, the lowest poverty rate for all population was 11.3% in 2000. The poverty rate was not only higher among the Hispanic population when compared with the total population and other races, but higher among children and other age group. The comparison between different races by age group is shown in Figure 3. The Hispanic population has higher poverty rate compared to other groups except the black population. The poverty rate was about 30% among Hispanic children and 20% among elderly population. The poverty among children was much higher than other age groups in all races. The Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. Lower household income and large family size will increase the possibility to live under poverty.

The rapidly growing Hispanic population with high poverty rate especially among children indicates their need for accessing public assistance programs. This study

examines Latino/Hispanic current participation level in the food stamp program, identify barriers and suggest strategies that can enhance their participation in the program.

**OBJECTIVES:**

The goal of the proposed study is to acquire an understanding of the dynamics of the Latino/Hispanic population and their participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP).

The specific objectives are to:

1. Develop socio-economic and demographic profile of the Latino/Hispanic population in the south.
2. Examine and evaluate participation level of the Latino/Hispanic population in the FSP in Tennessee.
3. Identify factors and barriers/constraints that account for non-participation in the FSP by eligible Latino/Hispanic population.
4. Develop programs and strategies to enhance their participation in the FSP.

**Methodology:**

Tennessee State University collaborated with the State Department of Human Services and a Faith Based Organization serving the Latino/Hispanic population in Tennessee and Kentucky. State administrative data, several secondary sources and survey data are used to investigate the characteristics of the rapidly growing Hispanic population, changes overtime and assess their need for food assistance. A Questionnaire was developed and translated into Spanish language to collect primary data from the Hispanic population in Tennessee and Kentucky. Faith Based organization assisted to collect the data. Training of data enumerators was conducted in both states. The following information was collected using the survey:

- Demographic and socio-economic characteristics

- Need for the food stamp
- Constraints and barriers for not participating in the FSP by eligible persons
- Characteristics of non-participating eligible children of ineligible parents
- Suggestions to improve access to the program

### **Participation of Latino/Hispanic Population in the Food Stamp Program:**

There were 14,870 food stamp participants in December 2003 in Tennessee. The total participation increased by 31.65% during Jan-Dec. 2003. The participation was 11,295 in the beginning of the year in the state. Majority of the participants are from two large metropolitan counties (Davidson and Shelby) in Tennessee. These two counties contribute about 41% of total participation in the state. These two counties also represent the same proportion of Hispanic population in the state. The remaining participation is also from other metro counties in the state.

The data showed that participation of Hispanics in the FSP increased rapidly in the states, compared to the total population. The total participation increased by 11.12% during Jan-Dec, 2003 but it was 31.65% for the Hispanic population. The total change was much higher for Hispanic children (31.65%) compared to 20.29% for Hispanic adults. The percent change for the total population was 11.23% for children and 11.02% for adults respectively.

The participation in FSP by Hispanics increased significantly in the metro counties, compared to adjacent and non-adjacent to metro counties. The Hispanic participation in the metro counties increased by 34.51%, adjacent to metro (24.16%) and non-adjacent to metro (10.33%) respectively. The participation increase was much higher for Hispanic children in metro counties when compared with the state average.

Similarly, total participation increased more in metro counties for the total population (12.21%) but much lower than the Hispanic population.

Total households receiving food stamps also increased significantly for Hispanic compared to total population. The Hispanic households increased by 36.87% compared to only 11.81% for the total participation. The percent change in household participation in the FSP by type of county is shown in Table 3.

### **Preliminary Survey Results:**

The data was analyzed by using 85 useable surveys from Hispanic respondents from Tennessee and Kentucky. Some of the demographic characteristics of respondents include 51% female, average household size (4.34), about 77% with high school or less education, 52% with less than \$5,000 annual household income and 72% families and 53% children without any health insurance. The results showed that government assistance (20%) including food stamp was the main source to fulfill their food needs, followed by religious organization (17.6%) and friends (10.6). The vast majority of the Hispanic respondents indicated that they do not know about the FSP (22.4%) and if they are eligible for the program (23%). The participation of Hispanics in the FSP can be increased through outreach to this 46% of the respondents. The results also showed that 52% of the respondents were less or not comfortable when applying for food stamps. The degree of their discomfort was due to several factors including availability of staff with Spanish language skills, attitude of the staff conducting interview and overall efficient service provided by the food stamp office. 27.6% of respondent also indicated (27.6%) that they were told by person conducting interview that their U.S. born children are not eligible for food stamp because their parents are in this country illegally. The

average waiting time when applying for food stamp was 2.86 hours and 63% of the respondents indicated that the waiting time is long.

The main sources of information about food stamps for the Hispanic population are: church/religious organizations (32.9%), followed by friends (31.8%) and radio/TV/News papers (7.1%). The respondents also indicated that providing information about the program will be well reached if radio/TV/News papers and religious organizations are used. 43.5% also suggested participation in the FSP can increase if number of staff with Spanish language skills is increased, followed by Spanish translated materials (20%) and more friendly staff in the food stamp office (11.8%). The results from this primary survey will help policy makers to design programs that can enhance participation of the Hispanic population in the FSP.

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Table 1. Total Hispanic population and percent change in the southern states 1990-2003.

	1990	2000	2003	Percent Change	
				2000-03	1990-03
<b>AL</b>	24,629	75,830	89,195	17.62	262.15
<b>AR</b>	19,876	86,866	100,378	15.55	405.02
<b>FL</b>	1,574,148	2,682,715	3,160,287	17.80	100.76
<b>GA</b>	108,933	435,227	541,123	24.33	396.75
<b>KY</b>	22,005	59,939	71,905	19.96	226.77
<b>LA</b>	93,067	107,738	117,260	8.84	26.00
<b>MS</b>	15,998	39,569	43,441	9.79	171.54
<b>NC</b>	76,745	378,963	466,704	23.15	508.12
<b>OK</b>	86,162	179,304	199,748	11.40	131.83
<b>SC</b>	30,500	95,076	114,217	20.13	274.48
<b>TN</b>	32,742	123,838	146,000	17.90	345.91
<b>TX</b>	4,339,874	6,669,666	7,556,869	13.30	74.13
<b>VA</b>	160,403	329,540	394,856	19.82	146.16
<b>South</b>	6,585,082	11,264,271	13,001,983	15.43	97.45
<b>U.S.</b>	22,354,059	35,305,818	39,898,889	13.01	78.49

Table 2. Distribution of Latino/Hispanic population by type of county in TN, 2000-03.

Type of County	2000	%	2003	%	Percent Change 2000-03
Metro	97,557	78.8	114,695	78.6	17.57
Adjacent to Metro	22,757	18.4	27,461	18.8	20.67
Not Adjacent to Metro	3,524	2.8	38,44	2.6	9.08
State	123,838	100	146,000	100	17.90

Table 3. Top five counties in Tennessee with Hispanic population, 2000-03

County	2000	2003	Percent Change 2000-03	Unemployment Rate (2003)
Davidson	26,091	31,976	22.56	4.5
Shelby	23,364	26,434	13.14	6.4
Rutherford	5,065	6,981	37.83	4.4
Hamilton	5,481	6,049	10.36	4.1
Montgomery	6,960	5,829	-16.25	4.7
State	123,838	146,000	17.90	5.8

Figure 1. Poverty level of Hispanic and all population in the U.S., 1972-2003.

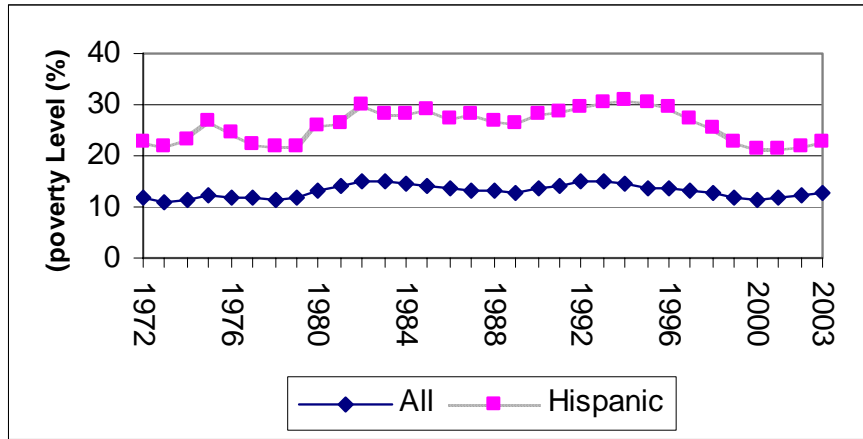


Figure 2. Poverty level in the southern states, 3-year average 2000-2003.

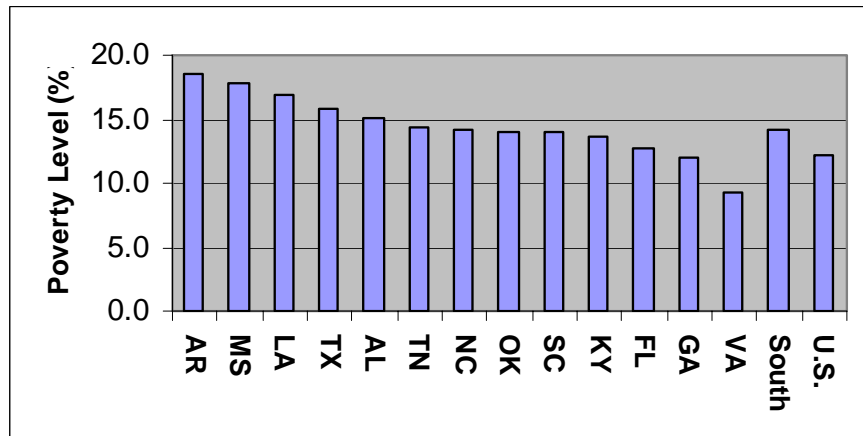


Figure 3. Poverty level by race and age groups in U.S., 2003.

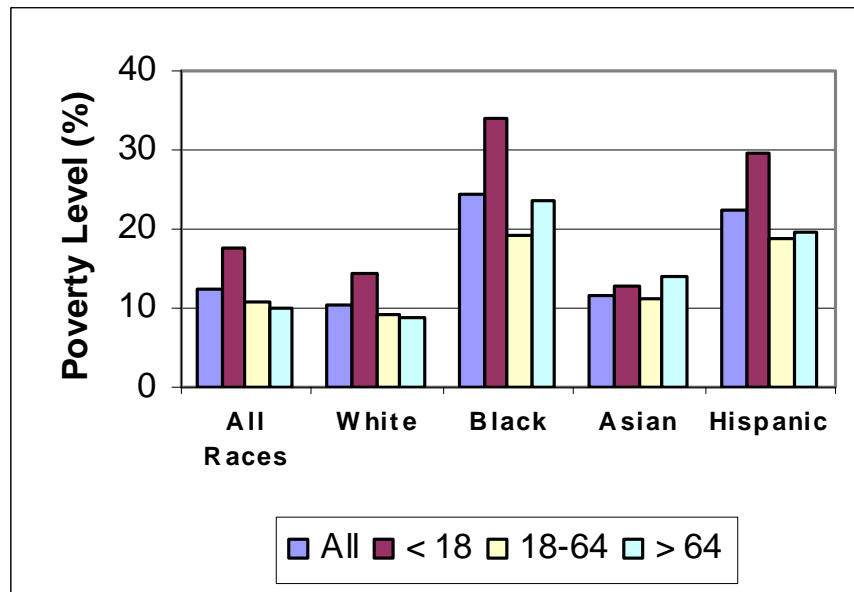


Table 4. Percent change of Hispanic and total population in the FSP by type of County, Jan-Dec. 2003.

Type of County	Latino/Hispanic			Total Population		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
Metro	21.28	38.71	34.51	12.32	12.09	12.21
Adjacent to Metro	19.21	25.70	24.16	8.54	8.96	8.71
Non-Adjacent to Metro	5.15	12.50	10.33	9.68	10.13	9.86
Total	20.29	35.28	31.65	11.02	11.23	11.12

Table 5. Percent change in Hispanic and total household participating in the FSP, Jan-Dec. 2003

	Hispanic	Total
Metro	38.59	12.97
Adjacent to Metro	30.88	9.37
Non-Adjacent to Metro	28.00	10.41
Total	36.87	11.81

Table 6. Top five counties in Tennessee with Hispanic participation in the FSP and percent change between Jan-Dec. 2003

	January	December	Percent Change
Davidson	2,716	3,641	34.06
Shelby	1,771	2,395	35.23
Hamilton	499	622	24.65
Montgomery	486	596	22.63
Knox	383	584	52.48
State	11,295	14,870	31.65

Table 7. Some demographic characteristics of the respondents

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	48.8
Female	51.2
Total number of people in household (No.)	4.34
<b>Education</b>	
< HS	32.9
HS	44.3
<b>Annual household Income</b>	
< \$5,000	51.6
\$5,000 -\$25,000	35.9
<b>Health Insurance</b>	
Families with health insurance	28.0
Children with health insurance	46.7

Table 8. Type of assistance received by Hispanic population to fulfill their food needs.

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>%</b>
Government assistance (Food Stamps) etc.	20.0
Religious organizations	17.6
Friends	10.6
Relatives	9.4
Second harvest food bank	4.7
None	4.7
Non-profit organization/charities	3.5

Table 9. Reasons for not receiving food stamp

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>%</b>
Don't know if I am eligible	23.5
Don't know about the Food Stamp Program	22.4
My eligibility run out	9.4
Don't know enough English to apply	5.9
Applied but denied	4.7
Application process is too complicated/difficult	3.5
Don't want to apply for Food Stamps	1.2

Table 10. Suggestions to improve food stamp services.

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>%</b>
Staff with Spanish language skills	43.5
Spanish translated materials	20.0
More friendly staff	11.8
Reduce time waiting	11.8
More staff	7.1