

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: IMPROVE THE NATION'S NUTRITION AND HEALTH

USDA promotes America's health through food and nutrition education, guidance and promotion to the general public and to targeted groups. We teach, inform and motivate Americans to use this information to improve their diets and physical activity patterns. We expand research and scientific knowledge about public health. By promoting better diets, reaching children early and ensuring access to healthy food, we make a major contribution to the Nation's health.

USDA is seeking to contribute to significant changes in the U.S population's nutrition status, and in management of the nutrition assistance programs, for 2007. We are targeting:

- Reductions in overweight and obesity that are consistent with the Nation's *Healthy People 2010* objectives published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- A 30% decrease in hunger among low-income people;
- A 15% increase in the participation rate among eligible people in the Food Stamp Program, a 12 % increase in the participation rate in the National School Lunch Program, and continued high participation rate in the WIC Program;
- Five point increases in the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) scores of children and low-income people, and a 2-point increase among the general public (HEI uses food intake data to measure the quality and variety of the American diet.).

In addition to these core program outcomes, we provide measures for significant projects and activities related to effective stewardship of the funds used to deliver these programs

Objective 4.1: Improve Access to Nutritious Food

USDA nutrition assistance programs, which serve 1 in 5 Americans over the course of a year, constitute the lion's share of the Federal effort to fight hunger in the United States. These programs include the Food Stamp Program, which provides coupons or electronic cards to help participants improve their food purchasing power, the school meals programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which provides supplemental food packages, nutrition education and referrals to health and human services. The Administration is committed to improving nutritional intake through increased access to, and utilization of, these vital programs by those eligible to participate.

Performance Measures

Baseline: 2000 — 10.9% of low-income households report experiencing hunger in an annual population survey.

Target: 2007 — Reduce low-income households that report hunger to 7.4%.

Baseline: 2000 — 58.7% of eligible individuals participated in the Food Stamp Program.

Target: 2007 — Reach 68% of the eligible population.

Baseline: 2002 — 52% of children enrolled in U.S. schools (public and private) participated in the National School Lunch Program.

Target: 2007 — Reach 55% of enrolled children.

Actionable Strategies

- Continue commitment to a national nutrition safety net by working with Congress to secure funding for the major nutrition assistance programs at a level that will ensure access for all those eligible who wish to participate.
- Implement a coordinated national effort to increase access to three underutilized programs: the Food Stamp Program, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the School Breakfast Program (SBP):
 - Conduct aggressive national and local outreach campaigns and grant awards;
 - Work with States to develop Food Stamp Program outreach plans;
 - Develop and promote policy improvements, including Food Stamp streamlining options included in the 2002 FSRIA, to reduce burdens for program operators and enhance support and access for working families.
- Work with the National Research Council’s Committee on Statistics to assess alternatives for estimating the number of WIC eligibles. Once this is complete, we will establish a target for servicing WIC eligibles.
- Increase awareness of the availability and value of Federal nutrition programs and services among the general public, including those potentially eligible for these programs and key State and local decision-makers:
 - Launch a national media campaign;
 - Translate program information and promotional materials into Spanish and other languages as appropriate;
 - Target outreach efforts to special audiences, such as the working poor, elderly, homeless, and eligible immigrants; and
 - Partner with external stakeholders to provide information and outreach to potential program participants.

Objective 4.2: Promote Healthier Eating Habits and Lifestyles

The Nation faces significant public health issues related to the quality of America’s eating habits—including an increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity. USDA intends to make use of its nutrition assistance programs and its broader nutrition education efforts as key opportunities to promote more healthful eating and physical activity across the Nation.

Performance Measures

Baseline: 1996 — On a 100-point scale, the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) of Americans with income under 130% of poverty was 61, and the HEI of American children in households under 185% of poverty was 63; the HEI of the U.S. population (2 years of age and over) was 63.8.

Target: 2007 — Increase scores for children and low income people by at least 5 points; increase the score for the broader U.S. population by at least 2 points.

Baseline: 2000 — 44.5% of postpartum women in the Women Infants and Children Program initiated breastfeeding.

Target: 2007 — 60% of WIC postpartum women initiated breastfeeding

Baseline: 1999 — 82% of elementary schools and 91% of secondary schools offered meal options to students that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines.

Target: 2007 — All elementary and secondary schools will offer meal options to students that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines.

Baseline: 2000 — 30% of U.S. adults (age 20 years and older) are obese; 15% of U.S. children and adolescents (ages 6-19 years) are overweight.

Target: 2007 — As a partner with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, take actions to encourage a reduction in overweight and obesity such that adult obesity will be no greater than 20% and child and adolescent overweight will be no greater than 8%.

Actionable Strategies

- Support the President’s *HealthierUS* initiative by:
 - Developing and supporting an integrated, cross-program nutrition education effort designed to address overweight and obesity, and other diet-related problems;
 - Partnering with the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to promote healthy nutrition environments in schools; and
 - Partnering with the National 5 A Day Partnership, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to promote increased consumption of fruits and vegetables.
- Work with providers to improve nutritional quality of nutrition assistance program meals and benefits.
- Promote breastfeeding as the preferred infant feeding practice.
- Help more people assess and improve their eating habits to reduce and prevent overweight and obesity by developing and disseminating printed and Internet-based tools.
- In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, update the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in 2005, and review the Food Guide Pyramid and consider improvements.
- Continuously advance the science of nutrition by monitoring food and nutrient consumption; updating nutrient requirements and food composition data; defining relationships between diet, genetic and lifestyle to prevent obesity and disease; and identifying socio-economic, cultural, and environmental forces that influence eating habits.

Objective 4.3: Improve Food Program Management and Customer Service

USDA is also strongly committed to maintaining a high level of integrity in the nutrition assistance programs and, to the extent possible, preventing errors and other problems before they occur.

New communication and e-commerce technologies represent a prime opportunity to serve our customers and work with our partners more effectively. We plan to make targeted, cost-effective investments to enable USDA to bring its programs and its business into the digital age.

Performance Measures

Increase the Food Stamp payment accuracy rate.

Baseline: 2001 — 8.7% error rate in Food Stamp payments.

Target: 2004 — Reduce the Food Stamp error rate to 7.8%.

Decrease to 9% the number of children certified for free school meals in excess of those estimated eligible.

Baseline: 1999 — 27% more children were certified for free meals than were eligible.

Target: 2007 — Will reduce to 9% the number of children certified for such meals in excess of those estimated eligible.

Provide services electronically to increase efficiency and ease-of-use.

Baseline: 2002 — 89% of Food Stamp benefits were delivered by Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT); one state used EBT to issue all WIC benefits.

Target: 2005 — All Food Stamp benefits will be delivered by EBT.

Target: 2007 — Four states will deliver all WIC benefits electronically; 10 additional states will test WIC EBT systems.

Baseline: 2002 — A small number of states used a web-based pre-screening tool to help recipients determine potential eligibility for Food Stamps.

Target: 2007 — All states will use a web-based FSP pre-screening tool (either USDA's or their own).

Actionable Strategies

- Support State efforts to improve food stamp benefit accuracy through oversight, training, technical assistance and “best practices” information-sharing.
- Pilot test, evaluate and work with Congress to enact major policy changes to improve school meals certification accuracy. Enlist the support of other Federal, State and local users of school meals certification data to ensure that resources can be properly targeted to those most in need.
- Increase training and technical assistance to improve State and local management in vulnerable programs.
- Provide technical assistance on EBT to States, and work with less active States to more aggressively implement systems.
- Support development of national WIC EBT standards, and test the viability of alternative WIC EBT technologies, including on-line, real time point-of-sale transaction processing.
- Continue development and promotion of a web-based eligibility “pre-screening” tool that allows recipients to determine their potential eligibility for the Food Stamp Program.

Key External Factors for Strategic Goal 4

Efforts to reduce hunger and improve dietary habits depend on coordination between USDA and its Federal, State and local partners, and effective compliance by partners with program standards and rules. Competing demands on tight State budgets may also affect the availability of administrative funds for certain efforts. The Department's ability to improve dietary habits is influenced strongly by the emphasis that the Nation more broadly places on healthy eating, including products and practices in the food marketplace.

The eGovernment goals and initiatives will depend on approval by policy officials external to USDA, and will be pursued in the context of a wide range of competing eGovernment priorities that may ultimately require shifts in attention and resources to more time-critical needs.