

Updated July 6, 2010

Caseload Trends for the DC Food Stamp Program

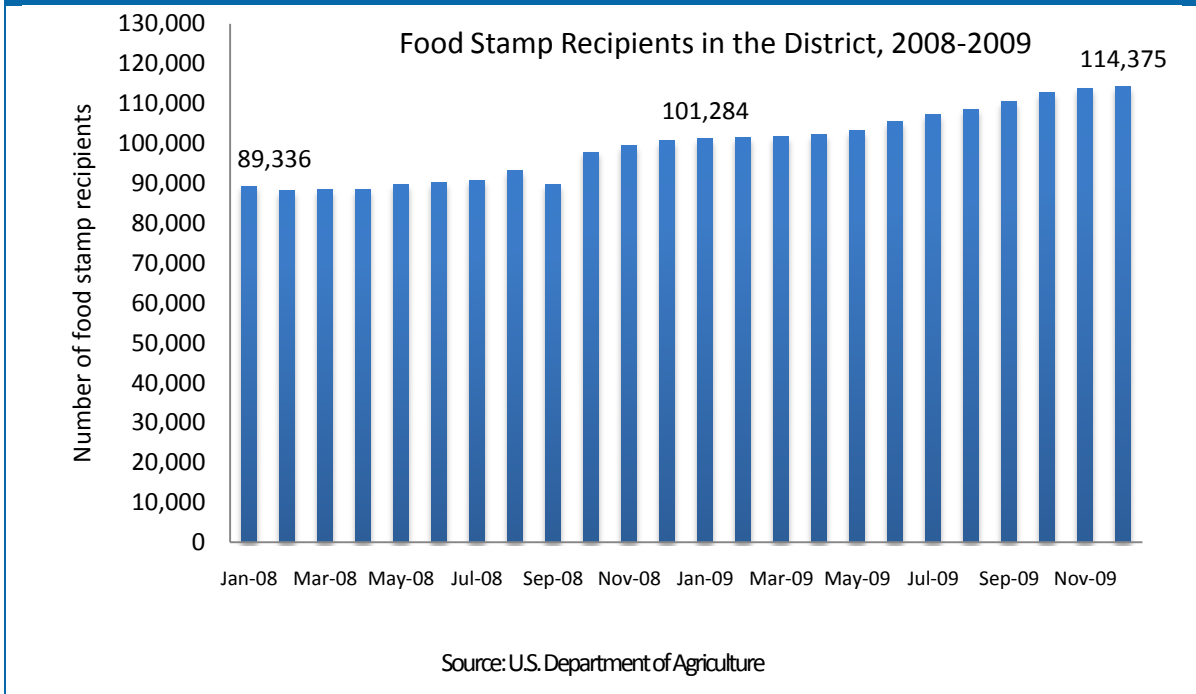
The Food Stamp Program (recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) provides monthly benefits to low-income households that can be used to buy food at most grocery stores and other food retailers. The food stamp program is funded by the federal government and operated by DC and the states. Recipients use food stamp benefits to buy food using an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card similar to a debit card.

Food stamp benefits vary by family size. For example, the maximum benefit for a family of three is \$526 per month. Under standard federal rules, residents must have incomes below 130 percent of poverty, or \$23,800 for a family of three, to be eligible. Legislation passed by the DC Council in 2009 created “categorical eligibility” for food stamps to allow some households with incomes up to 200 percent of poverty to qualify for assistance.

Over the past 20 years, DC’s SNAP caseload has generally responded to the rise and fall of the economy. Most recently, the number of DC residents receiving food stamps has skyrocketed as a result of the recession, reaching the highest level in two decades.

- Caseloads increased during the economic downturn of the early 1990s before decreasing as the economy improved in the late 1990s. A similar trend was seen in the early 2000s, as the number of food stamp participants increased in response to an economic decline. (The large increase in October 2003 is due to the provision of Disaster Food Stamps to more residents that would normally be eligible for food stamps following Hurricane Isabel.)
- Most recently, the District’s food stamp caseload began to rise in April 2008. The number of food stamp recipients rose from 85,600 in October 2007 to 97,800 in October 2008 and 112,800 in October 2009. Over the 2-year period, the number of DC residents receiving food stamps increased by 27,000, or nearly one-third.
- Between fiscal year (FY) 2008 and 2009, the average monthly food stamp caseload increased by 16 percent. This was the greatest increase since FY 1991.

FIGURE 1: FOOD STAMP CASELOADS HAVE RISEN THROUGHOUT THE CURRENT RECESSION



Food Stamp Resources

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Policy Basics: Introduction to the Food Stamp Program,” <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2226>.

DC Hunger Solutions, “The Food Stamp Program,” http://www.dchunger.org/fedfoodprogs/foodstamps/food_stamps.htm.

DC Income Maintenance Administration, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” <http://dhs.dc.gov/dhs/cwp/view,a,3,q,641238.asp>.

Food Resource and Action Center, “Latest SNAP/Food Stamp Program Participation Data,” http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fspparticipation.html.