



September 30, 1999

No. 98

Food Stamps Not Reaching Majority of Texas' Poor

County Estimates of Number of Poor Texans Receiving Food Stamps: 1995 vs. 1999

The attached chart estimates the increase in the number of poor Texans not receiving Food Stamps in the four-year period following the implementation of state and federal welfare reforms. Food Stamp participation peaked in 1994 and has fallen steadily ever since, both nationwide and in Texas. From 1994 to 1999, Food Stamp enrollment in Texas dropped by 47 percent, from 2.7 million participants in 1994 to 1.4 million in August 1999. This drop has not been accompanied by any significant decrease in poverty in Texas during the same time period; in many counties, the number of poor Texans has actually increased. Because the Food Stamp caseload in Texas has dropped more sharply than the number of people living in poverty, there is significant concern that many eligible Texans may not be getting the nutrition assistance they need to feed their families. Of particular note is that more children from poor and low-income families may be going hungry, or are not adequately nourished to learn and grow into healthy, productive adults. It is estimated that one in 10 children in Texas are already hungry or at risk of hunger. Over 50 percent of the Food Stamp caseload in Texas are children.

Background: Several factors have contributed to the dramatic decline in Food Stamp participation since 1994. A recent report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) cites the strong U.S. economy, tighter food stamp eligibility requirements, and welfare reform initiatives as the primary reasons for the decline in food stamp participation.¹ Federal welfare reform legislation passed in 1996 maintained Food Stamps as an entitlement program, but tightened the program's eligibility standards by establishing work requirements for able-bodied adults without children and by disqualifying most legal immigrants from participating in the program. As a result of these changes, there were approximately 110,000 fewer legal immigrants receiving Food Stamps in Texas in September 1999 than in July 1996. Participation by childless adults has fallen by 77 percent since 1996, with 60,000 fewer Food Stamp participants in this population now than in 1996.

Efforts by states to reduce their welfare caseloads (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], formerly

AFDC) via time limits and work requirements are also a likely factor in the Food Stamp decline. Under Texas' welfare reform waiver (granted in 1995), the state discourages potential clients from applying for cash assistance and emphasizes employment as the goal and expectation for families receiving TANF benefits. Under the *Texas Works* initiative, a cornerstone of Texas' welfare reform approach, eligibility workers at the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) are trained to divert applicants from applying for TANF by providing them with job leads or directing them to resources in the community that will help them find employment. Because clients seeking TANF and/or Food Stamp assistance go to one location to apply for both benefits, there is real concern that the aggressive approach to keeping clients off cash assistance may also have actively discouraged many eligible Texans from applying for and receiving Food Stamps.

It is also likely that burdensome application and recertification requirements have discouraged many Texans from taking advantage of Food Stamp benefits for which they are eligible. Under federal law, states are allowed to set recertification periods (intervals at which Food Stamp recipients are required to return to an eligibility office to recertify for benefits) that range from one to 12 months. Typically, a household with a fixed or no income will only be required to appear once every 12 months to recertify for Food Stamps, while families with earned income may be required to come into a DHS office every month. Following the imposition of \$13.4 million in fines by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the state's higher-than-average payment error rates (issuing too much or too little in benefits), Texas implemented stricter application and recertification requirements to lower its error rate. These include pre-certification investigations of "high-risk" applicants and shorter certification periods for recipients with earned income, among other measures. By March 1999, 45 percent of Food Stamp households in Texas were required to recertify for benefits every three months, as opposed to less than 6 percent in 1994. Although these measures earned Texas \$19 million in enhanced federal Food Stamp funding this year in reward for reduced error rates, it is possible that they may also be deterring needy Texans, in particular working families, from applying for benefits to which they

¹"Food Stamp Program: Various Factors Have Led to Declining Participation," GAO, July 1999.

are entitled. Given that families with income receive less in Food Stamp benefits than those with no income, requiring a time-consuming recertification appointment every three months may be perceived by working families as more trouble than the Food Stamps are worth.

CPPP staff will research these and other factors relating to the Food Stamp decline for a report to be released later this Fall. In the meantime, the following is clear from this initial analysis of poverty and Food Stamp participation data:

- The Food Stamp decline has far outpaced the decline in the number of poor Texans in every region of the state;
- The percentage of poor Texans who DO NOT receive Food Stamps has increased from at least 25 percent in 1995 to at least 56 percent in 1999; and
- Although the percentage of poor Texans receiving Food Stamps varies considerably from county to county, in every county but five² the percentage of poor Texans NOT receiving Food Stamps was higher in August 1999 than in 1995.

Note: Comparing the number of people living in poverty to the number of Food Stamp recipients in a given county may not fully account for how many eligible residents of the county are potentially unserved by the program, for these reasons:

- Food Stamps are available to families with gross incomes up to 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) guidelines, which means that the number of poor (100% of FPL) in a given county may underestimate how many residents in that county are eligible for Food Stamps. In Brooks County, for example, there are an estimated 3,391 people living in poverty in 1999, and 3,342 Food Stamp recipients.

- In this county, there are more people receiving Food Stamps than there are poor, because some households have qualified with incomes above the poverty level. Unfortunately, county-level estimates for 1999 are only available for Texans living below 100 percent of FPL, and not for those living below 130 percent of poverty.

- Food Stamp eligibility standards include a resource test, which disqualifies families with assets over \$2,000, and a vehicle asset test, which disqualifies families who own a car valued above \$4,650. So it's possible that a family living below poverty would not qualify for Food Stamps based on their assets.

Because families with incomes above the poverty level can also qualify for Food Stamps, CPPP's estimate of the number of poor statewide NOT receiving Food Stamps is lower than DHS' estimate of the number of potentially eligible Texans who will not receive Food Stamps in 2000. In its Legislative Appropriations Request for the 2000-01 biennium, DHS estimated that it would serve only 35 percent, or 1.5 million recipients, of the eligible Food Stamp population in FY 2000. Under this estimate, approximately 2.9 million potentially eligible Texans will go unserved by the program next year.

Despite these caveats, using the number of poor to estimate how well the Food Stamp program reaches those in need is still a good measure of the effectiveness of the program in serving low-income Texans. In Texas, over 90 percent of Food Stamp recipients lived below the poverty level in 1997, with 48 percent living below 50 percent of the FPL.

² In four counties, Edwards, Hudspeth, Oldham, and Roberts, the percentage of poor receiving Food Stamps increased from 1995 to 1999, while in one county, Lipscomb, the percentage stayed the same.

**County Estimates of the Increase in the Percentage of Poor Texans NOT Receiving Food Stamps
1995 to 1999**

Texas Counties	1995			1999		
	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ³	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁴	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁴	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ⁵	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁵	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁶
Anderson	5,295	2,825	35%	3,189	6,095	66%
Andrews	2,153	129	6%	1,246	1,515	55%
Angelina	9,298	3,900	30%	6,722	6,473	49%
Aransas	3,494	1,367	28%	2,680	1,853	41%
Archer	420	423	50%	262	829	76%
Armstrong	53	152	74%	52	218	81%
Atascosa	7,126	1,621	19%	4,637	4,689	50%
Austin	1,793	1,404	44%	818	2,475	75%
Bailey	1,171	539	32%	740	904	55%
Bandera	900	843	48%	875	1,296	60%
Bastrop	4,501	2,331	34%	2,915	5,834	67%
Baylor	521	376	42%	380	499	57%
Bee	5,883	1,121	16%	3,743	3,738	50%
Bell	22,014	9,502	30%	13,196	19,862	60%
Bexar	208,389	46,206	18%	122,230	151,763	55%
Blanco	335	577	63%	92	954	91%
Borden	2	48	96%	2	133	99%
Bosque	1,569	1,174	43%	815	1,955	71%
Bowie	11,201	2,656	19%	7,837	6,672	46%
Brazoria	19,384	5,360	22%	7,286	21,941	75%
Brazos	11,549	11,808	51%	6,998	14,282	67%
Brewster	1,008	934	48%	806	1,504	65%
Briscoe	179	292	62%	127	254	67%
Brooks	3,422	0	0%	2,622	946	27%
Brown	4,699	2,143	31%	3,381	3,490	51%
Burleson	2,204	645	23%	1,192	1,882	61%
Burnet	3,144	1,357	30%	1,462	3,383	70%
Caldwell	4,458	2,039	31%	2,763	4,471	62%
Calhoun	2,865	1,024	26%	1,753	2,395	58%
Callahan	1,259	872	41%	1,004	1,121	53%
Cameron	104,049	21,217	17%	88,173	27,498	24%
Camp	1,681	406	19%	1,077	918	46%
Carson	247	285	54%	135	605	82%
Cass	4,725	1,310	22%	2,856	2,980	51%
Castro	1,815	552	23%	1,276	930	42%
Chambers	2,007	574	22%	797	2,090	72%
Cherokee	5,630	3,229	36%	3,957	4,396	53%
Childress	1,009	571	36%	883	701	44%
Clay	605	622	51%	431	1,002	70%
Cochran	999	159	14%	481	529	52%
Coke	274	247	47%	141	513	78%
Coleman	1,592	705	31%	1,158	909	44%
Collin	10,394	9,663	48%	3,154	17,980	85%
Collingsworth	592	266	31%	442	358	45%
Colorado	2,366	1,028	30%	1,342	2,305	63%
Comal	4,181	3,002	42%	2,128	7,605	78%
Comanche	1,565	1,268	45%	1,225	1,497	55%

³ DHS Annual Report, 1995. This report includes the annual average of the number of Food Stamp clients served monthly in 1995.

⁴ The number of poor in each county is based on U.S. Census data for Texas for 1995.

⁵ DHS, number of Food Stamp recipients per county as of August 1999 cut-off.

⁶ The number of poor in each county is based on estimates prepared by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, May 1999.

**County Estimates of the Increase in the Percentage of Poor Texans NOT Receiving Food Stamps
1995 to 1999**

Texas Counties	1995			1999		
	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ³	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁴	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁵	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ⁵	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁶	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁷
Concho	297	342	54%	145	566	80%
Cooke	3,533	1,632	32%	1,689	3,253	66%
Coryell	4,483	3,342	43%	2,469	8,295	77%
Cottle	397	178	31%	257	246	49%
Crane	546	103	16%	246	585	70%
Crockett	570	279	33%	395	545	58%
Crosby	1,987	145	7%	1,399	783	36%
Culberson	903	137	13%	559	597	52%
Dallam	830	297	26%	525	325	38%
Dallas	223,024	66,593	23%	74,397	171,100	70%
Dawson	3,206	929	22%	1,911	1,721	47%
Deaf Smith	3,922	1,008	20%	2,692	2,021	43%
Delta	732	274	27%	437	525	55%
Denton	12,498	11,027	47%	3,541	27,807	89%
Dewitt	3,229	1,105	25%	1,695	2,870	63%
Dickens*	457	170	27%	222	376	63%
Dimmit	4,367	197	4%	3,213	1,389	30%
Donley	507	287	36%	350	422	55%
Duval	4,347	300	6%	3,156	1,928	38%
Eastland	2,012	1,671	45%	1,689	1,806	52%
Ector	22,854	4,035	15%	13,418	11,443	46%
Edwards	678	412	38%	514	274	35%
Ellis	8,304	3,890	32%	3,439	11,092	76%
El Paso	167,537	44,056	21%	131,026	79,665	38%
Erath	2,681	2,786	51%	1,405	3,591	72%
Falls	3,446	848	20%	2,111	2,302	52%
Fannin	2,880	1,849	39%	1,471	3,017	67%
Fayette	1,618	1,401	46%	1,122	2,358	68%
Fisher	458	504	52%	300	559	65%
Floyd	1,942	424	18%	1,146	832	42%
Foard	242	141	37%	191	175	48%
Fort Bend	17,449	11,540	40%	4,308	29,482	87%
Franklin	769	663	46%	324	960	75%
Freestone	2,199	845	28%	1,332	2,045	61%
Frio	4,420	1,084	20%	3,053	2,193	42%
Gaines	1,991	1,567	44%	933	1,759	65%
Galveston	30,978	5,125	14%	12,679	23,498	65%
Garza	883	269	23%	568	571	50%
Gillespie	731	1,499	67%	614	2,481	80%
Glasscock	59	161	73%	15	181	92%
Goliad	1,091	127	10%	744	837	53%
Gonzales	3,573	1,150	24%	2,071	2,460	54%
Gray	2,258	1,046	32%	1,821	1,648	48%
Grayson	10,318	4,266	29%	5,322	9,273	64%
Gregg	13,575	4,218	24%	8,365	8,443	50%
Grimes	2,697	1,476	35%	1,605	2,980	65%
Guadalupe	8,306	3,622	30%	4,973	9,895	67%
Hale	6,392	2,055	24%	4,033	3,838	49%
Hall	745	338	31%	519	400	44%
Hamilton	808	563	41%	512	846	62%
Hansford	288	393	58%	163	437	73%
Hardeman	598	356	37%	384	526	58%
Hardin	4,672	1,853	28%	2,255	4,087	64%

**County Estimates of the Increase in the Percentage of Poor Texans NOT Receiving Food Stamps
1995 to 1999**

Texas Counties	1995			1999		
	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ³	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁴	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁵	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ⁵	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁶	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁷
Harris	433,739	163,977	27%	132,883	277,848	68%
Harrison	8,072	3,323	29%	4,336	6,873	61%
Hartley	32	227	88%	23	580	96%
Haskell	967	534	36%	731	657	47%
Hays	5,534	5,194	48%	3,227	10,794	77%
Hemphill	96	185	66%	86	272	76%
Henderson	7,735	3,837	33%	3,823	8,632	69%
Hidalgo	185,370	25,358	12%	163,979	35,196	18%
Hill	4,298	1,701	28%	1,999	3,682	65%
Hockley	3,662	1,107	23%	2,438	2,510	51%
Hood	2,602	1,303	33%	1,097	3,442	76%
Hopkins	2,343	2,764	54%	1,369	3,289	71%
Houston	3,621	1,320	27%	2,483	2,320	48%
Howard	4,516	1,740	28%	2,793	3,325	54%
Hudspeth	515	516	50%	627	389	38%
Hunt	8,309	2,829	25%	4,046	7,155	64%
Hutchinson	2,029	937	32%	1,283	2,472	66%
Irion	160	83	34%	50	210	81%
Jack	856	409	32%	518	682	57%
Jackson	1,712	725	30%	909	1,636	64%
Jasper	4,963	1,222	20%	3,665	2,779	43%
Jeff Davis	159	174	52%	92	360	80%
Jefferson	37,810	9,934	21%	24,224	20,701	46%
Jim Hogg	1,677	34	2%	1,146	830	42%
Jim Wells	10,932	984	8%	7,322	4,583	38%
Johnson	9,881	3,746	27%	3,644	13,012	78%
Jones	2,280	1,452	39%	1,595	2,156	57%
Karnes	2,737	904	25%	1,709	2,245	57%
Kaufmann	6,884	2,109	23%	3,392	6,509	66%
Kendall	974	1,082	53%	595	1,687	74%
Kenedy*	22	48	69%	2	89	98%
Kent	33	66	67%	13	167	93%
Kerr	4,445	1,687	28%	2,572	4,430	63%
Kimble	475	355	43%	352	424	55%
King	10	23	70%	0	N/A	N/A
Kinney	794	98	11%	660	391	37%
Kleberg	7,695	133	2%	5,458	3,332	38%
Knox	725	389	35%	597	481	45%
Lamar	6,688	2,373	26%	4,847	3,415	41%
Lamb	2,717	985	27%	1,559	1,910	55%
Lampasas	1,744	1,261	42%	1,153	1,604	58%
Lasalle	1,730	326	16%	1,227	835	40%
Lavaca	1,645	1,331	45%	936	2,149	70%
Lee	828	1,027	55%	591	1,825	76%
Leon	1,675	849	34%	1,003	1,803	64%
Liberty	9,405	1,827	16%	4,481	6,185	58%
Limestone	3,415	1,128	25%	2,233	2,358	51%
Lipscomb	106	250	70%	119	272	70%
Live Oak	1,484	549	27%	869	1,278	60%
LLano	979	883	47%	389	1,883	83%
Loving	1	10	91%	0	N/A	N/A
Lubbock	33,190	11,225	25%	19,857	20,645	51%
Lynn	1,368	411	23%	756	817	52%

**County Estimates of the Increase in the Percentage of Poor Texans NOT Receiving Food Stamps
1995 to 1999**

Texas Counties	1995			1999		
	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ³	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁴	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁵	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ⁵	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁶	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁷
Madison	1,830	571	24%	1,161	1,490	56%
Marion	2,204	710	24%	1,565	1,105	41%
Martin	809	293	27%	355	660	65%
Mason	393	405	51%	178	554	76%
Matagorda	6,010	1,507	20%	2,185	5,403	71%
Maverick	19,975	1,862	9%	13,113	5,452	29%
McCulloch	1,591	612	28%	862	1,197	58%
McLennan	28,514	10,742	27%	15,199	20,584	58%
McMullen	40	85	68%	33	110	77%
Medina	5,029	1,820	27%	2,929	4,699	62%
Menard	459	205	31%	273	325	54%
Midland	13,230	4,783	27%	8,057	7,763	49%
Milam	3,864	1,301	25%	2,298	2,756	55%
Mills	500	424	46%	263	611	70%
Mitchell	1,129	700	38%	810	1,209	60%
Montague	1,831	1,392	43%	1,101	1,763	62%
Montgomery	20,384	8,221	29%	8,041	19,328	71%
Moore	1,367	933	41%	1,171	1,686	59%
Morris	1,864	693	27%	1,306	1,273	49%
Motley	139	140	50%	88	195	69%
Nacogdoches	7,066	4,386	38%	5,887	5,177	47%
Navarro	5,924	2,234	27%	3,413	4,780	58%
Newton	2,503	674	21%	1,773	1,538	46%
Nolan	2,691	858	24%	2,072	1,602	44%
Nueces	58,641	13,089	18%	34,314	35,981	51%
Ochiltree	619	533	46%	474	761	62%
Oldham	55	185	77%	94	219	70%
Orange	10,622	2,066	16%	6,572	6,731	51%
Palo Pinto	4,084	1,076	21%	1,534	3,200	68%
Panola	2,928	1,056	27%	1,871	2,495	57%
Parker	4,566	3,317	42%	1,707	7,570	82%
Parmer	978	980	50%	520	1,340	72%
Pecos	2,807	1,209	30%	1,685	2,569	60%
Polk	5,999	1,747	23%	3,816	4,296	53%
Potter	19,500	3,478	15%	11,703	9,543	45%
Presidio	2,642	743	22%	2,007	1,082	35%
Rains	634	522	45%	470	873	65%
Randall	3,587	4,057	53%	1,930	9,563	83%
Reagan	399	143	26%	258	585	69%
Real	750	21	3%	517	250	33%
Red River	2,093	1,249	37%	1,454	1,636	53%
Reeves	3,412	1,134	25%	1,908	2,600	58%
Refugio	1,472	236	14%	962	805	46%
Roberts	1	34	97%	6	122	95%
Robertson	3,395	751	18%	2,072	2,022	49%
Rockwall	1,540	882	36%	601	2,234	79%
Runnels	1,451	705	33%	986	1,296	57%
Rusk	5,255	3,214	38%	2,781	5,052	64%
Sabine	1,273	572	31%	972	1,108	53%
San Augustine	1,238	638	34%	1,098	875	44%
San Jacinto	3,205	1,002	24%	1,938	2,458	56%
San Patricio	14,888	1,726	10%	8,215	8,462	51%
San Saba	826	720	47%	424	755	64%

**County Estimates of the Increase in the Percentage of Poor Texans NOT Receiving Food Stamps
1995 to 1999**

Texas Counties	1995			1999		
	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ³	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁴	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁵	Number of Food Stamp Recipients ⁵	Number of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁶	Percent of Poor NOT Receiving Food Stamps ⁷
Schleicher	419	137	25%	280	355	56%
Scurry	2,038	1,032	34%	1,588	1,789	53%
Shackelford	321	188	37%	245	273	53%
Shelby	3,636	1,369	27%	2,763	1,954	41%
Sherman	98	224	70%	89	246	73%
Smith	16,920	9,201	35%	8,760	16,235	65%
Somervell	708	254	26%	209	639	75%
Starr	25,736	2,720	10%	22,739	5,041	18%
Stephens	1,044	749	42%	677	990	59%
Sterling	87	91	51%	30	195	87%
Stonewall	182	135	43%	145	218	60%
Sutton	446	264	37%	400	470	54%
Swisher	1,333	677	34%	824	915	53%
Tarrant	112,224	48,598	30%	42,460	123,872	74%
Taylor	14,158	5,900	29%	9,605	10,290	52%
Terrell	173	129	43%	75	252	77%
Terry	2,730	561	17%	1,911	1,257	40%
Throckmorton	143	146	51%	108	164	60%
Titus	2,753	1,767	39%	1,833	2,435	57%
Tom Green	12,503	4,373	26%	8,393	10,738	56%
Travis	60,779	26,398	30%	31,424	53,297	63%
Trinity	2,001	658	25%	1,397	1,434	51%
Tyler	2,551	969	28%	1,660	2,095	56%
Upshur	4,007	2,055	34%	2,451	3,138	56%
Upton	636	94	13%	208	628	75%
Uvalde	7,030	934	12%	4,963	2,672	35%
Val Verde	12,146	1,786	13%	7,554	6,081	45%
Van Zandt	4,179	3,063	42%	2,033	4,913	71%
Victoria	11,314	2,794	20%	5,522	8,639	61%
Walker	4,961	3,322	40%	2,449	7,091	74%
Waller	4,281	1,325	24%	1,475	3,444	70%
Ward	2,026	343	14%	1,344	1,435	52%
Washington	2,856	1,450	34%	1,878	2,928	61%
Webb	52,631	12,003	19%	45,710	18,359	29%
Wharton	5,649	2,056	27%	2,252	5,324	70%
Wheeler	508	409	45%	384	468	55%
Wichita	13,865	5,530	29%	9,749	10,441	52%
Wilbarger	1,729	926	35%	1,281	1,605	56%
Willacy	8,161	358	4%	6,566	1,600	20%
Williamson	8,261	6,386	44%	3,824	17,056	82%
Wilson	3,225	1,413	30%	1,895	3,840	67%
Winkler	1,269	212	14%	777	993	56%
Wise	2,775	2,423	47%	890	4,550	84%
Wood	3,404	2,471	42%	1,896	3,840	67%
Yoakum	831	591	42%	587	944	62%
Young	1,989	1,046	34%	1,474	1,357	48%
Zapata	3,993	185	4%	3,093	1,206	28%
Zavala	5,334	525	9%	3,892	1,857	32%
Texas	2,637,195	863,131	25%	1,469,746	1,838,041	56%

You are encouraged to copy and distribute this edition of
THE POLICY PAGE