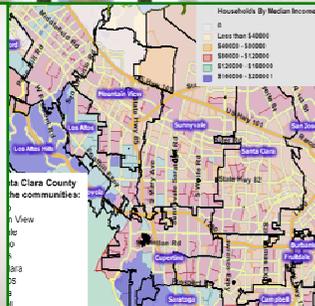




Struggling for Sustenance: Food Stamp Program/SNAP Access Barriers in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Food Stamp Program (FSP), known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is a crucial component of California's safety net, helping more than 2.9 million Californians and nearly 100,000 residents of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties put nutritious food on the table. The FSP has provided particularly vital support during the recent recession, as rising unemployment has led to a 42% increase in participants state-wide between September 2007 and September 2009.¹

Yet many eligible households still do not participate in the program. The most recent data suggests that California ranks second to last among all states with a 48% participation rate of eligible households. Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties (SHFB) commissioned a Congressional Hunger Center Fellow to conduct a six-month research project on the barriers that prevent eligible families in the two counties from accessing the FSP. This report presents the findings of that study. Drawing on more than 40 interviews with social service professionals and SHFB partner agencies, as well as nearly 400 surveys of SHFB clients – low-income community members who receive SHFB food – the report identifies local Food Stamp access barriers, and provides recommendations to inform SHFB's outreach, advocacy, and community partnerships.

The data collected in the study suggests that lack of information about the FSP is the most commonly-cited barrier to participation. Other significant barriers include:

- Verification documents required to prove income, deductions, and citizenship
- Fears among immigrants that the FSP will impact their current or future immigration status
- Low literacy among potential applicants
- Quarterly reporting requirements
- Stigma of the FSP as a “welfare” program
- Complex and changing eligibility rules
- Understaffed county offices with little time to assist individual applicants navigate the application process.

Some barriers are limited to specific geographic regions. These include:

- Transportation to the county office
- Stigmatization by clerks at certain grocery stores
- Lack of EBT vendors in Pescadero
- Difficulties for homeless individuals to receive paperwork related to their case

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

The report also provides recommendations for steps that can be taken by decision-makers (federal, state, and local) and local partners to increase FSP participation in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Governmental steps include:

- Reducing documentation required for verifications
- Eliminating California's finger-imaging requirement
- Ensuring full staffing for county eligibility workers
- Opting-in to waiver of face-to-face interview for all households
- Trainings for county workers on immigrants' concerns
- Making FSP materials available in languages other than English and Spanish

Local community-based partners can help by:

- SHFB training other organizations in FSP outreach and application assistance
- SHFB developing non-print outreach materials (radio, TV)
- Doctors, schools, places of worship, and WIC offices publicizing and/or pre-screening potential applicants for the FSP
- Immigration law experts and advocates participating in outreach events to reduce the immigration-related myths
- Local residents encouraging their local stores to accept EBT

The report concludes by suggesting that further research is necessary to quantify the impact of each of the identified barriers. An in-depth study of the effectiveness of various outreach methods would also help SHFB focus and refine its efforts to increase FSP participation in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to all those who contributed to the production of this report with their time, insight, questions, and support. Cindy McCown, Senior Director of Programs and Services at Second Harvest Food Bank, was the driving force behind this research and supplied her wealth of knowledge about the local community as well as her inspiring passion for increasing Food Stamp Program participation. Anna Olsen, Associate Director of Programs and Services, allowed full access to all aspects of the Food Bank's FSP work and facilitated contacts with local partners. Mayra Tapia, Food Stamp Outreach Coordinator, served as translator, meticulous editor, and a constant source of insight born of experience. SHFB's Food Stamp Outreach Team shared anecdotes from their time in the field and allowed me to tag along and observe outreach in action. A huge thanks to Luz Ayala for her willingness to brave wind and rain to help facilitate the survey, and to the dedicated multilingual volunteers who joined in the effort. Thanks also to Jonathan Doherty for assistance with layout of the final report and issue briefs.

I am also thankful to staff members at the following local organizations who took time out of their hectic schedules to share their knowledge of barriers to Food Stamp access and propose ideas for improvement. Many of their observations and recommendations are contained in the report, though the report does not reflect the views of any one individual or organization. All errors and misrepresentations are mine alone.

C.O.M.E. Lutheran	Pacifica Resource Center
Cabrillo Unified School District	People Who Care/Crossroads Christian Center
Coastside Farmers Markets	Pie Ranch
Coastside Hope	Pillar Ridge
Collective Roots	Puente de la Costa Sur
Daly City Community Center	Rahima Foundation
Daly City Partnership Collaborative	Redwood City Salvation Army
Ecumenical Hunger Program	Redwood City School District
El Concilio	Sacred Heart Community Services
Emergency Housing Consortium	San Jose Presbytery
Fair Oaks Community Center	San Jose Salvation Army
First Presbyterian Church of San Jose	San Mateo Council of Labor AFL-CIO
Gilroy Unified School District	Santa Maria Urban Ministry
Gloria Dei Lord's Pantry	Santee Neighborhood Action Center
InnVision	Shelter Network
Institute for Human and Social Development	Society of St. Vincent de Paul of San Mateo County
Interfaith Council on Economics and Justice	South County Collaborative
Legal Aid of San Mateo County	South County Housing
Lincoln Community Center	St. Joseph's Family Center
Living and Loving Education Center	St. Louise Hospital Health Benefits Resource Center
Loaves and Fishes	Sunnyvale Community Services
Macedonia Church of God Pantry	West Valley Community Services
Mid-Peninsula Housing	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)–San Mateo County
Mountain View Community Services	
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church	

I am also appreciative of the staff of Santa Clara County Social Services Agency and San Mateo County Human Services Agency for allowing me access to tour their facilities, learn about the Food Stamp Program application process, and gather insight from intake workers and supervisors.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to meet strong and proud people throughout the two counties and thankful to all survey participants for sharing their personal stories of struggle.

Finally, a note of thanks to the staff of the Congressional Hunger Center, and particularly Aileen Carr, for the support I have received throughout the period of my fellowship. With their guidance, I have been able to focus on the minute details of a two county area while keeping my eyes on the larger story of hunger and poverty throughout the United States.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Etan Newman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Etan Newman
Emerson National Hunger Fellow

INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).² Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federally-funded benefits now help 36 million people nation-wide put food on the table, equivalent to one in every eight Americans and one in every four American children.³ The FSP is primarily a nutrition program, aiming to combat hunger by providing low-income Californians modest help in buying healthy and nutritious food. Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets throughout the state. As the recent recession has led to a climb in the numbers of low-income and food insecure people throughout the country, the FSP has gained media attention as a life-saving safety net for millions of people. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. For many Californians, the FSP has become a vital pillar of support and the only protection against chronic hunger.

Santa Clara and San Mateo counties have seen a recent steep rise in the number of FSP participants. In Santa Clara County, the number of FSP participants increased by 23% between September 2008 and September 2009, bringing the total number of people in the county receiving food assistance through the FSP to around 80,000. In San Mateo County, the number of FSP participants increased by 45% during that same period, meaning that almost 15,000 people in the county now participate in the FSP.⁴

As both poverty and FSP participation throughout the state has risen recently, the effect of the recession on the FSP participation *rate* of eligible people remains unmeasured. Still, it's clear that many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. According to the most recent data (2007) from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the government agency which administers the program, California ranks 50th among states in FSP/SNAP participation rate, with only 48% of eligible people state-wide participating in the FSP.⁵ The local story is worse. California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) estimates that **only 18% of income-eligible people in San Mateo County received Food Stamps in 2007. In Santa Clara County only 39% of income-eligible people participated. CFPA found that 129,935 income-eligible people in both counties combined may have been eligible for the FSP but did not receive the benefits.** Because FSP benefits are funded by the federal government and spent in local stores, CFPA estimates that the **loss of potential economic activity due to low participation rates exceeds \$325 million a year in the combined two counties.**⁶

Recognizing the importance of the FSP as one way to end hunger in our community, Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties (SHFB) began helping eligible local households apply for the FSP in February 2008. In two years of outreach and application assistance SHFB's Food Stamp

² California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

³ Jason DeParle and Robert Gebeloff, "Food Stamp Use Soars, and Stigma Fades," *New York Times*. 28 November 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com>

⁴ California Budget Project. <http://www.cbp.org>

⁵ US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2007*. November 2009. <http://fns.usda.gov>

⁶ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

Outreach team has directly assisted thousands of people in applying for the FSP and has informed countless more about the program. SHFB has also joined other local and national anti-hunger advocates in pushing for changes to overcome the barriers that continue to discourage eligible families from applying for the FSP. As a trusted local leader in the fight against hunger, SHFB has been able to publicize the collective barriers to FSP participation faced by local low-income households while working simultaneously to help individual households apply for much-needed benefits.

This report provides an in depth account of barriers to FSP participation in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by community members who receive food from SHFB, the report leverages SHFB's unique position as a community-based leader with close ties to local food providers and low-income families and individuals. This report aims to collect information about the FSP in the two counties and provide on-the-ground evidence to inform the outreach, education, and advocacy efforts of SHFB and community organizations, detailing county-level recommendations and local partnerships that will improve FSP outreach and increase FSP participation. By giving voice to local stakeholders, including low-income individuals and social service professionals, the report hopes to allow their perspective to influence the wider debate, thereby helping the FSP better serve those who need it most.



METHODOLOGY

The data for this report are qualitative in nature and were collected through a combination of interviews and surveys between September-December 2009.

Interviews of social service professionals and volunteers

Interviews of local social service professionals and agency-based volunteers aimed to collect background information on the demographic makeup of various communities within Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, as well as the extent to which local organizations that provide food and other social services to low-income individuals are currently involved in publicizing the FSP. The interviews roughly relied on a set of questions that included the interviewee's own assessment of barriers to the FSP among their clients, and any suggestions for how those barriers could be overcome (see Appendix A for the questions). The list of interviewees was not random, but rather generated in collaboration with SHFB agency relations staff from SHFB local contacts in each of the Food Bank's nine geographic service regions. These first contacts were almost exclusively connected to agencies that receive food from the Food Bank. The "snowball method," by which interviewees suggested other people to contact for the study, was then used to find more interviewees, some of whom had little or no connection with SHFB.

Most interviews occurred in a one-on-one format, but a few were conducted in a regularly-scheduled staff meeting of a partner agency, and so included the responses of many professionals and/or volunteers at the same time. Meetings and interviews were also conducted with a small collection of county Food Stamp eligibility workers from Santa Clara County Social Services Agency and San Mateo County Human Services Agency.

Surveys of Food Bank food recipients

Surveys were conducted among SHFB food recipients themselves. The surveys aimed to collect first-hand data on two related questions:

1. Why do many of those who are eligible for the FSP not apply?
2. What are the most difficult parts of the process for those who have applied in the past?

Both questions aimed to identify barriers to participation: the first in assessing the reasons people may not begin the process of applying; the second in understanding two dynamics: (1) Which parts of the application process may discourage people from completing the process (ie. why do some people withdraw their application)? (2) Which aspects of the process may discourage one-time applicants from re-applying in the future should they be initially denied or terminated?

394 completed surveys of community members who receive SHFB food were collected at 21 locations, of which 20 were SHFB food distribution locations. These included direct distributions, such as Family Harvest, Produce Mobile, and Mobile Pantry sites, as well as food pantries. SHFB distribution locations were chosen for the survey because of the presence of low-income individuals and families in need of food, many of whom may be eligible for the FSP. SHFB distributions also tend to have long lines where people waiting for food would be standing with time to answer the survey questions. One additional site was chosen that was an education center providing English as a Second Language classes to low-income women.

The survey was entirely voluntary and no actual or perceived reward was given for its completion. Survey facilitators were given a copy of two questionnaires: one for those who had never applied for the FSP and the other for those who had applied for the FSP sometime in the past. Facilitators were asked to have each survey participant answer the questions on either one of the questionnaires, but not both. All questions were open-ended and did not include any multiple choice answers, so as to allow the participant freedom in conceiving of the answers in any way they chose. In general, facilitators asked the questions to each participant and recorded their answers so as not to assume any particular level of literacy. However, some survey participants requested to write themselves and were given the opportunity. Written questionnaires were available in Spanish and English (see Appendix B), and facilitators who spoke other languages (Vietnamese, Russian, and Mandarin) were able to translate the questions and conduct the surveys in those languages with participants who spoke them. There was an attempt to include facilitators who spoke the two or three most common languages at each survey location.

Follow up interviews

11 follow up interviews were conducted with survey participants and/or SHFB Food Stamp application clients whose stories about applying for the FSP seemed particularly representative of the sample and/or especially detailed. These were not random, but were done in order to obtain in-depth personal accounts of barriers throughout the FSP application process. The stories are not representative of all applicants, but they do provide insight into the confusion inherent in the process for many applicants, as well as difficulties faced in negotiating the complex FSP eligibility requirements.

Collecting and analyzing the data

Responses from the service provider/volunteer interviews were collected and analyzed alongside others from the same geographic service area. Many of their responses are included in both general and more specific (ie. quotations) form in the geographic-based Food Stamp Issue Briefs (Appendix C).

The survey results were coded based on the themes found in answers across the sample and the data was analyzed around these themes. The code-scheme is below:

Previous Applicants to the FSP:

1. How did you find out about Food Stamps?

Social Service Office/County/Medi-cal Worker
Doctor or Medical Professional
Food Provider/Community-Based Org
Second Harvest Food Bank
School
WIC
TV/Radio
Friend/Family Member

2. Did you get help applying from SHFB?

Yes
No

3. Was the application process easy or difficult?

Easy
Difficult because of paperwork/many questions/too many documents
Difficult because transportation/distance to office
Difficult because wait time
Other

4. Did you have trouble getting to the Food Stamp office?

Yes
No

5. What was confusing about the process?

Paperwork/documentation
Making/keeping my interview appointment
Unreturned phone calls from Social Services
I didn't know who to trust/Heard bad rumors
Confused/upset about how they counted income and/or benefit level
Didn't speak my language
Nothing
Other

6. Are you getting food stamps now?

Yes
No - I was denied
No - I was removed/suspended
No - I don't need them/I'm over the income level
No - I was ineligible because of asset test
No - I'm scared of how they might impact me or my children
No - I'm on SSI
No - no explanation
I'm still waiting for a decision
Other

7. Would you recommend Food Stamps to a friend?

Yes
No

Participants who have never applied to FSP

1. Do you think you're eligible for Food Stamps?

Yes
No - because of restrictions on immigrants
No - because my income is too high
No - I (or others in family) have a job
No - because I'm on SSI
No - other explanation
I don't know
Other

2. Why haven't you applied for Food Stamps?

I don't think I'm eligible
I'm scared it will impact my immigration status
I heard you have to pay it back
I heard they take your kids to the military
Too many requirements/intrusive process
I don't need them/leaving them for others
I don't know enough about it
Other

3. What have you heard - good or bad - about Food Stamps?

They are helpful
People misuse them
Receiving Food Stamps impacts your immigration status
You/your children will have to pay them back
Your children will be taken to the army
I haven't heard anything
Other

4. What would change to make you apply?

More information about eligibility and how to apply
Improving access/easier process/less documentation
Include those currently ineligible (undocumented immigrants, SSI recipients)
Raise income level
Raise benefit level
Remove fingerprinting
A worse situation in my life
I don't know
Nothing - I'll never apply
Other

SURVEY RESULTS

I. Population surveyed

Though the population surveyed was not a random or representative sample of people eligible for the FSP, or even of low-income San Mateo and Santa Clara county residents, the population is broad enough to draw some conclusions about barriers to the FSP across the board. Below is general information about those surveyed:

394 people completed the survey, broken down in the following way by SHFB geographic service region:

Where was this Survey Taken?		
Geographic Service Region	Percentage of Total	Number
North San Mateo County (SMC)	16.8%	66
Central SMC	7.1%	28
South SMC	13.2%	52
Coastside SMC	8.4%	33
North Santa Clara County (SCC)	15.5%	61
Central San Jose	18.0%	71
East San Jose	5.3%	21
Milpitas/Alviso	2.8%	11
South SCC	12.9%	51
TOTAL	100.0%	394

In addition, the surveyed population was about evenly split between those who had applied for the FSP in the past and those who had never applied:

Have you ever applied for Food Stamps before?		
	Percentage of Total	Number
Past applicant for FSP	49.5%	195
Never before applied for FSP	50.5%	199
TOTAL	100.0%	394

II. Difficulties for past applicants

Though discussion of FSP access barriers often focuses on why some eligible households never begin the application process, knowing about the difficulties that past applicants have experienced in the process of applying for the FSP is important for two main reasons:

1. Hardships throughout the application process may deter applicants from completing the process, prompting withdrawals and/or no-shows to the interview
2. For applicants who either are denied at initial application, or who have benefits terminated at a later time, hardships throughout the application process may deter them from applying again in

the future should they become eligible. Indeed, 47% of those surveyed who said they had applied for the FSP in the past are no longer participating in the program. This suggests that the population of eligible households who have applied for the FSP in the past but no longer receive Food Stamps may represent a substantial number of non-participating FSP-eligible households.

Additionally, knowledge about the FSP often spreads by word of mouth. Past applicants, if faced with many hardships, may tell neighbors and friends that the process “is not worth it.”

Below are some conclusions supported by the survey answers from past applicants:

1. Providing verification documents is the most onerous part of the FSP process:

Among past applicants, a majority of 60% recounted the FSP application process as “easy.” Likewise, 51.8% of respondents said that “nothing” was confusing. However, a significant 46 respondents, or 23.6% of past applicants, noted that they had difficulty with the paperwork or providing verification documents. 39 respondents, 20.0% of past respondents, said that providing verification documents was confusing. The problem is both with obtaining the documents and presenting them to the office. When she couldn’t provide pay stubs or rental receipts, one respondent reported being reprimanded by the eligibility worker. At least two respondents reported being suspected of lying. Other respondents recounted that they had sent in the necessary documents but were told that they hadn’t been received.

“They ask so many questions! If you don’t send in your documents, they cut you off. They tell you you’re lying.”
-East Palo Alto mother of five

“The Food Stamp application form was easy, but getting all my documents together took months because of my disability. They ask for so much!”
-San Carlos resident

2. Complex eligibility calculations make benefit levels confusing and difficult for applicants to monitor

Knowing the calculations behind a certain benefit amount is important for an applicant to check accuracy and ensure that they will not receive more or less benefits than they are entitled to (those who receive more, even if it is a county mistake, may be required to pay back the excess amount). But the complex calculations involved in determining eligibility and benefits make it nearly impossible for many applicants to make sure their benefits have been calculated correctly. 14 respondents (7.2%) cited being upset about how eligibility or benefits were calculated, while receiving no explanation from the eligibility worker. Some even suspected that the eligibility worker miscalculated, but did not feel that they knew enough to correct the mistake.

"I asked the worker to double check her calculations multiple times, but the worker still denied me. One month later, they called me back saying they had miscalculated and I was actually eligible. I was very angry because I knew they were miscalculating and told them to double check but they didn't."

-Redwood City mother of three

3. Rules about sponsorship for legal immigrants are confusing and misleading

Some respondents noted that the FSP rules for legal immigrants are confusing and can prevent eligible FSP applicants from completing the application. "Deeming" of a sponsor's income can make some applicants ineligible for the FSP even if they do not receive support from their sponsor. However, if the applicant's income is below 130% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, they do not need to count a sponsor's income on their application, and can in fact apply without the sponsor's signature. Some respondents reported being worried that their sponsor would be reported for failure to provide for them. These respondents did not know that they could opt-out of the application and apply for non-sponsored household members with no repercussions to the sponsor. The web of rules around sponsorship make this option seem confusing to many FSP-eligible legal immigrants. One survey respondent spoke of his decision not to apply for the FSP because of this issue, despite his need for food assistance.

"I got the form for my sponsor to fill out, but he never returned it so I withdrew my application. I didn't know that I could apply even without my sponsor's signature."

-San Bruno resident

4. Work requirements in San Mateo County lead some to withdraw their application

Four respondents mentioned that the Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) work requirement for adults in San Mateo County was confusing and discouraged them from finishing the application. Though it is not a state requirement, San Mateo County makes it mandatory for non-working adults to participate in the Food Stamp Employment and Training program (FSET) in order to receive Food Stamps. The requirement to attend the training in San Carlos without pay posed transportation problems for one FSP recipient, and made another upset that the county office did not trust her to search for employment on her own. At least one applicant decided to withdraw because of this requirement.

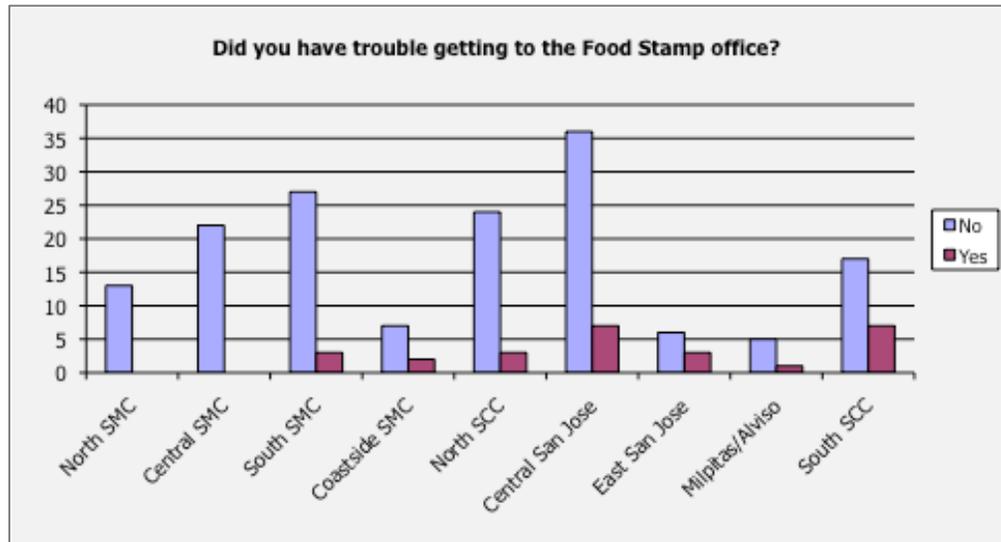
"We qualified, but I said, 'forget it, it's not worth it.' My husband had a fight with the social worker. They thought he didn't want to work, but I was the one working. He had to stay home with our kids."

-East Palo Alto mother of five

5. Transportation to the county office is a hardship in some areas

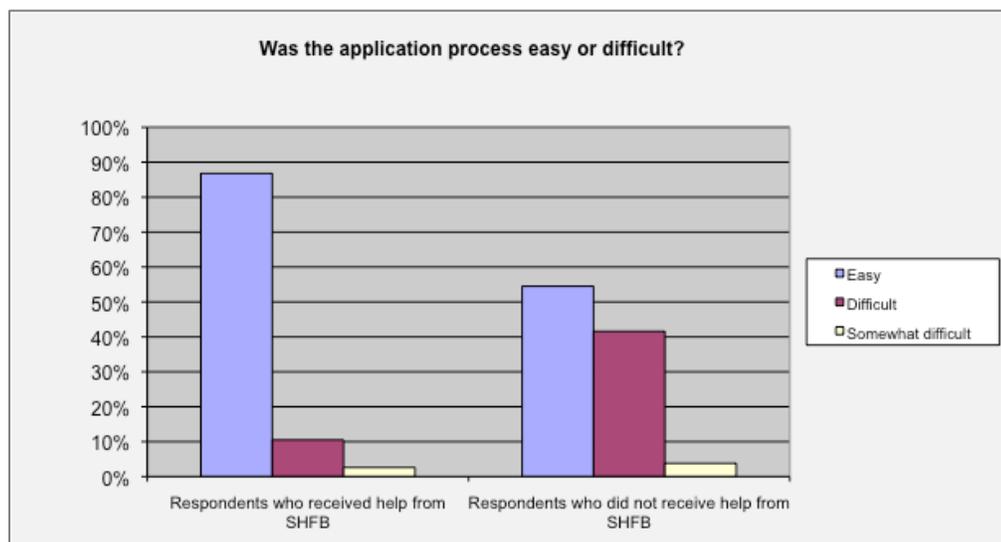
Though overall a large majority (80.9%) of respondents said that getting to the Food Stamp office was not a problem, in some geographic regions transportation was a barrier. In South Santa Clara County for example, 26.9% of respondents said they had trouble getting to the Food Stamp office. These

respondents may not have known about the possibility of a hardship waiver of the face-to-face interview. In other locations, getting to the office was only a problem for a subset of the population. One homeless man recounted having to sleep outside the Mountain View SSA office so he could “check his mail” three days in a row to find out if he had been approved for emergency food stamps.



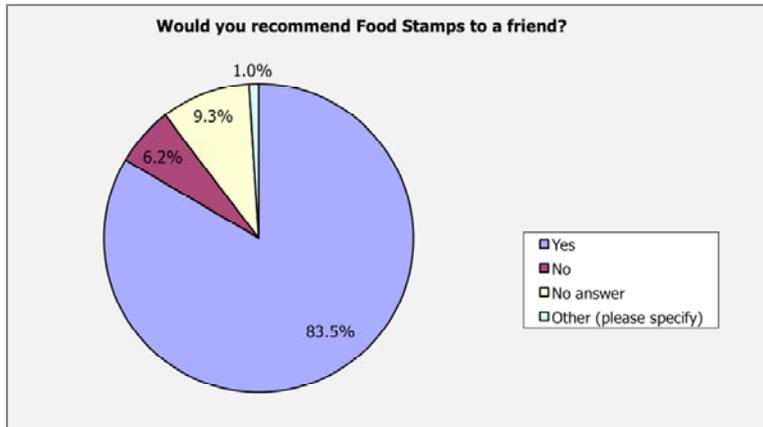
6. Receiving help from Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) made the application process easier

Applicants who received help applying for the FSP from SHFB were more likely to describe the process as “easy” than those who applied on their own. Of those who received help from SHFB, 86.8% described applying for Food Stamps as “easy,” and just 13.1% described the process as “difficult” or “somewhat difficult” in some way. Of those who applied on their own, 54.5% described the process as “easy” and 45.4% described the application process as “difficult” or “somewhat difficult.”



7. Most respondents think the FSP is an important and helpful program

83.5% of those surveyed said they would recommend the FSP to a friend if they needed it. Even among those who said the FSP application process was “difficult” in some way, 78.6% said they would recommend the program to a friend. This seems to suggest that the majority feel the benefits are worth the trouble applying. Still, some people who may be eligible remained unhappy with their experience applying for the program.



“I used [Food Stamps] the first day I got them. It was the first time I was able to buy my own groceries in a year.”

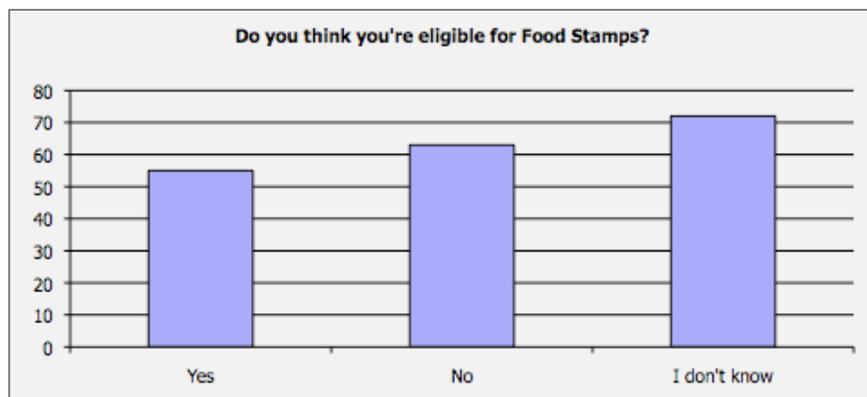
-San Jose mother of three

III. Barriers for those who have never applied

In order to increase participation in the FSP among eligible households, it is important to know what is keeping some households from applying in the first place. The survey asked those who had never applied for the FSP about their reasons for avoiding the program. Below are some conclusions supported by survey responses:

1. Many people think they are eligible but still haven't applied

Although the largest group of respondents who had never applied before were not sure whether or not they qualified for the FSP (36.2%, 72 respondents), a substantial portion of those who had not applied for the FSP believed they were eligible (27.6%, 55 respondents). In other words, some people who know about the FSP and suspect that they are eligible still refrain from applying. Additionally, 45.5% of those who believed they were eligible (25 respondents) reported hearing that the FSP was “good” or “helpful,” but still had not applied. This suggests that barriers to applying exist even for those who think they could probably benefit from the FSP.



2. Despite outreach efforts, many don't know enough about whether they are eligible or how to apply

At least half of the 21 survey locations had been used as outreach sites for SHFB Food Stamp Outreach in the past. Even so, many respondents (27.1% or 54 respondents) said that the reason they had not applied to the FSP was that they didn't know enough about whether they were eligible or how to apply. Among those who responded that they thought they were eligible for the FSP, 34.6% said lack of information was the greatest barrier. 49.1% of those who thought they were eligible said that if they had more information about the benefits of the FSP and how to apply they'd be more likely to do so.

Why haven't you applied for Food Stamps?		
	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
I don't know enough about the process	25.5%	54
I don't think I'm eligible	24.1%	51
I don't need them/leaving them for others	11.3%	24
I'm scared it will impact my immigration status	5.2%	11
Too many requirements/intrusive process	3.8%	8
Don't have time/lengthy process	3.3%	7
Only newly eligible	2.8%	6
I heard you have to pay it back	1.9%	4
Pride	1.9%	4
Other	11.3%	24
No answer	9.0%	19

3. The myth among immigrants that receiving Food Stamps will negatively impact future attempts to become a citizen (the “public charge” myth) persists, as do other negative myths

A substantial number of respondents (13) said they had heard that receiving Food Stamps would make them a “public charge” or hurt their chances of becoming citizens in the future. 11 respondents said this was the reason they hadn't applied for the FSP. This rumor is false, and may grow out of a perceived association of the FSP with cash aid (including CalWorks and General Assistance). Recipients of cash aid may be considered a “public charge” when attempting to adjust their immigration status, but recipients of Food Stamps will not. Unfortunately, this mistaken perception persists.

Additionally, a few respondents said they had heard other rumors about negative effects of the FSP, including that children would have to pay them back (four respondents) and that children would be taken to the military when they become adults (two respondents). These rumors continue to stoke fear of the program among immigrant communities.

“I've heard Food Stamps will affect you if you want to become a citizen. I've also heard that you have to pay it back or your kids will be sent to the military.”

-Pescadero resident

4. Many are deterred from applying by the difficulty and/or intrusiveness of the process

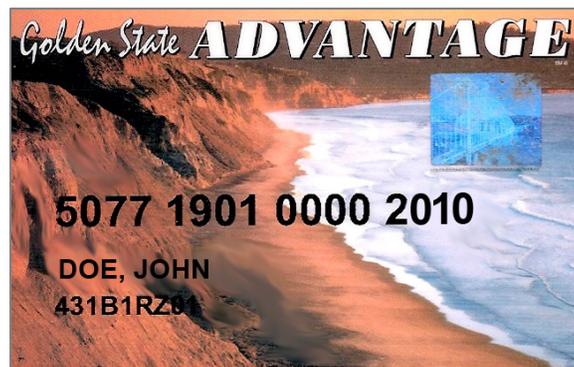
Among those who either thought they were eligible for the FSP or were unsure about their eligibility, a substantial number (19 respondents) said they would apply if the process were easier, quicker, or less intrusive. Though it wasn't always clear what respondents meant by "intrusive," some cited the numerous documents they've heard are necessary to bring to a FSP appointment. Others may have been referring to the California requirement that all adult FSP applicants must be fingerprinted. An additional nine respondents said they would apply if they had help filling out the application. Three respondents needed help in a language they felt was not normally spoken by county staff (including Chinese and Russian).

"I've heard from friends that it's very difficult to apply."

-Daly City resident

Those who think they're eligible or are unsure: What could change to make you apply?

	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
More information about eligibility and process	44.9%	61
Improving access/easier process/less documentation	14.0%	19
A worse situation in my life	6.6%	9
Help with the application	6.6%	9
Transportation	2.9%	4
Include those currently ineligible (undocumented immigrants, SSI recipients)	2.2%	3
Trustworthy source to dispel myths	2.2%	3
Information in my language	2.2%	3
More time in my life to apply	2.2%	3
I don't know	7.4%	10
Nothing - I'll never apply	5.1%	7



Sample California EBT Card

5. Complex and changing eligibility rules (especially SSI Cash-Out) create misconceptions about whether an individual is eligible or not

Some respondents said that they had never applied for the FSP because they didn't qualify. When pressed for why, many revealed misconceptions about who is eligible. For example, one respondent declared that "I can't apply because I live with someone who receives SSI." Another said he was ineligible because he had a disability. A third noted that because he was retired he didn't qualify for the FSP. In each of these cases, the SSI "cash-out" disqualification rule had been mis-interpreted to disqualify a larger swath of the population than simply SSI recipients.⁷ Other respondents expressed other misconceptions, including that the FSP is only for families with children, or only for pregnant mothers. Eight respondents said they thought the FSP was only for those not working, and because they had a job they were ineligible. One respondent forcefully asserted that she was certain she didn't qualify because she owned her own home. The home a person lives in is not counted as a "resource," and does not impact Food Stamp eligibility in California.



*"I can tell you I'm 100% sure I don't qualify for Food Stamps.
I own my own home, that's why."*

-Sunnvale resident

⁷ California is the only state to disqualify SSI recipients from the FSP. Instead of Food Stamps, SSI recipients are given "cash-out," an additional sum included as part of SSI income, intended to cover food. This rule only disqualifies SSI recipients; other members of an SSI recipients' household may be eligible.

BARRIERS

The survey results, when analyzed alongside anecdotes gathered in interviews with social service professionals and county eligibility workers, point to a number of barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. Many barriers exist across the two-county area, while others are specific to each county or a certain geographic region within the county.

1. Barriers across both counties

- 1. Lack of Knowledge:** Despite outreach efforts by Second Harvest Food Bank and other partner agencies, many potentially eligible households throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties lack knowledge about the FSP and are unsure whether or not they are eligible. Many food and social service providers in the area do not know enough about the FSP to encourage eligible households to apply. Complex and changing eligibility requirements make many households confused about whether they are eligible or unaware of new rules (such as the elimination of the asset test for households with children) that may make them newly eligible for benefits.
- 2. Fears among the immigrant community:** Though undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the FSP, any member of the household who is a US Citizen or qualified immigrant can apply. Many of the FSP-eligible individuals in both San Mateo and Santa Clara counties are from mixed-immigration status families. Some are worried that applying will impact other family members; others have heard myths that their children will have to pay the benefits back, or will be taken to the army when they reach 18. In addition, the myth that receiving Food Stamps makes one a “public charge” and will negatively impact recipients when they want to become citizens persists even among legal immigrants.
- 3. Low Literacy:** Food Stamp Outreach has generally been done through flyers, posters, and other written information. While this method works for some, social service professionals reported that many FSP-eligible people in both San Mateo and Santa Clara counties have limited literacy. Even if these individuals do find out about the FSP, filling out an application on their own may be an insurmountable barrier.
- 4. Stigma:** Santa Clara and San Mateo counties house some of the wealthiest communities in the United States. Social service professionals reported that for their low-income clients, living among wealthy neighbors makes asking for financial assistance very embarrassing. The recent recession has led many previously-stable families to seek out food assistance, but some don't want their neighbors to know they need help. Though the introduction of EBT cards has made using Food Stamps less conspicuous, some survey respondents cited “pride” as a reason they haven't applied for the FSP – even as they stood in a line at an SHFB food distribution. These individuals would still rather go to a food pantry than use a special card at the supermarket, where everyone can see. The finger-imaging requirement only adds to the shame some FSP applicants reported. Additionally, though the national name change to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has attempted to re-brand the FSP as a nutrition program, the FSP continues to be identified with welfare. This perception led some to explain that they haven't applied because they don't want a “hand-out” from the government.

- 5. Verification Documents:** The complicated process of providing verification documents for identity, income, utilities, child care, and other bills is a significant barrier to completing the FSP application process. Some respondents explained that it took weeks to pull together the necessary documentation, and others simply became discouraged and gave up. Though counties are expected to assist applicants in obtaining the correct documentation, eligibility workers reported being swamped with new applicants - they often could not take time to help households with this requirement. Additionally, many surveyed households seemed not to know that some verification documents can be replaced by an affidavit or other method; if they cannot obtain these documents, those who don't know may unnecessarily withdraw their application.
- 6. Quarterly Reporting:** County eligibility workers noted that the requirement that FSP households must report their income and deductions every three months leads to many households falling off the FSP and having to re-apply. For those whose income fluctuates, a successful reporting month followed by a few jobless months leads to termination of the FSP at the very time the benefits are needed most. For those with limited English or literacy, receiving the quarterly report can be overwhelming, and with no one to help fill it out, nearly impossible to understand. Social service professionals explained that finding and sending the correct verification documents from the correct month creates additional confusion for many households.
- 7. Unclear Denial and Approval Letters:** Some applicants reported confusion over the denial letters from both county offices. When mixed-status immigrant families apply for the FSP, they receive a denial letter for each member of the family who is an ineligible undocumented immigrant. Some receive this letter before they have submitted all their documentation and so believe that their entire family has been denied. One county eligibility worker said that she sometimes receives calls from worried families who are confused and do not know that their children have been deemed eligible, even if the parents have been denied. Though these particular cases received their benefits, it is probable that other families do not call, never return the necessary documents, and their cases are closed.
- 8. SSI Cash-Out:** California is the only state which denies SSI-recipients access to the FSP by including additional money ("cash-out") as part of those individuals' SSI income. Yet the "cash-out" received from SSI is inadequate to cover food and other expenses for some survey respondents. These respondents noted that their SSI fixed income is almost \$300 less than the FSP gross-income guidelines; without the SSI "cash-out" rule, they would possibly qualify for the maximum Food Stamp benefit. Instead, they rely on Second Harvest Food Bank's Brown Bag program and other food pantries for food assistance.
- 9. Language:** North and West Santa Clara County is home to many immigrant communities not represented elsewhere in Santa Clara County, such as Chinese, Russian, and Iranian immigrants. Likewise, North San Mateo County is home to immigrant communities not represented elsewhere in San Mateo County, such as Chinese, Filipino, and Middle-Eastern immigrants. Outreach materials often don't exist in their native languages, and many members of these communities do not speak English. Some don't know that they can request translators for their Food Stamp appointment, and so are hesitant to apply at all. Social service professionals reported frustration in trying to help non-English speaking clients who receive their quarterly report or other letters from the county office and cannot understand the forms.

- 10. Sponsorship Requirements:** Some legal immigrants and social service providers reported being confused by the complicated rules regulating immigrant sponsorship and the FSP. “Deeming” of a sponsor’s income can make some legal immigrant applicants ineligible for the FSP. Other respondents were worried that their sponsor would be reported for failure to support them if they applied for the FSP. It seems that many sponsored immigrants don’t know they can opt-out of the application and apply for non-sponsored household members with no repercussions to the sponsor. The rules around sponsorship are so complicated and misunderstood that many eligible legal residents simply do not apply.
- 11. Work Requirement:** Though it is not a state requirement, both San Mateo and Santa Clara counties make it mandatory for many *non-working* adults to participate in the Food Stamp Employment and Training program (FSET) in order to receive Food Stamps. The requirement to attend vocational training, job search and/or workfare in a specific location poses transportation problems for some FSP recipients. San Mateo County eligibility workers noted that the work requirement is a significant deterrent to some applicants, and that mandatory FSET leads many emergency FSP cases to be terminated once the emergency period ends.

II. Local Barriers in Santa Clara County

- 1. Social Services Agency Funding:** Santa Clara County saw an increase of 23% in FSP participants in the year between September 2008 and September 2009. Combined with budget and staffing cuts, this need has put an incredible strain on the SSA office. Though the county continues to process most applications within the 30-day statutory limit, the demand on eligibility workers is great, and many cannot spend as much time with applicants as would be desired. Some former applicants reported confusion about their case and frustration with the worker for not having the time to explain the eligibility decision. The problem seems to be heightened in the South County office in Gilroy, where fewer workers and greater staff turnover create a longer wait for decisions for many applicants, and impact the quality of customer service in the office.
- 2. Homeless Population:** Significant homeless populations in both San Jose and Gilroy face great barriers to accessing the FSP. To apply and remain on the FSP, homeless households must continue returning to the SSA office to “check their mail,” to ensure they have provided all the necessary documentation and to receive and submit quarterly reports. Though Santa Clara County has developed a Restaurant EBT program for homeless, elderly, and disabled FSP households to spend their FSP benefit for hot food, only four restaurants are currently participating in the program. Homeless FSP households who cannot make it to one of these participating vendors cannot use their EBT to purchase hot meals.
- 3. Drug Felon Ineligibility:** Individuals who have been convicted of a drug felony (related to sale of illegal drugs) are ineligible for the FSP for the rest of their lives. Drug charges are the only felony which carries this punishment; other felons in California may still be eligible. The rule also punishes the rest of a drug felon’s household, who must count his/her income but cannot count the felon as a member of the Food Stamp household in the benefit calculation. Survey results seem to suggest that drug felon ineligibility has disproportionate impact in San Jose, but it may affect households throughout the two counties.

- 4. Isolated Poverty:** North and West Santa Clara County houses some of the wealthiest communities in the country. The pockets of poverty in this area are often hidden and isolated. In some areas, such as Cupertino, social service professionals noted that a lack of county services and infrequent public transportation make it very difficult for low-income households to access needed services. The SSA North County office in Mountain View is helpful for those who live nearby, said one social services professional, but not easily accessible to those who live in communities further south, according to another. In addition, because low-income communities are dispersed throughout the area, knowledge about social services, including the FSP, is lower than in other areas of concentrated poverty.

III. Local Barriers in San Mateo County

- 1. Human Services Agency Funding:** San Mateo County saw an increase of 45% in FSP participants in the year between September 2008 and September 2009. At this time of heightened need, the county has a hiring freeze in place and a 14% vacancy rate, which translates to a deficit of 45-50 eligibility workers. This has led to a backlog in FSP applications, with some applicants not receiving an appointment within the 30-day statutory limit. The understaffing problem seems to be worse at particular offices, especially the North County office in Daly City - some applicants and partner agencies have reported waits of 45 to 60 days for a decision from this office. Additionally, overburdened eligibility workers cannot spend as much time with individual applicants as desirable. This leads to some applicants reporting confusion about their case and frustration with the worker for not having the time to explain the eligibility decision.
- 2. Stigmatization by store clerks:** Social service professionals and local residents have reported that certain grocery stores, particularly on the San Mateo County Coastside and in Pacifica, draw attention to customers who use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. When store clerks draw attention to EBT-users, those who need help and have considered applying for the FSP may be convinced otherwise.
- 3. Isolation of the Coastside:** The Coastside's geographic isolation from the rest of the county makes it difficult to access many services. Though the Human Services Agency (HSA) has out-posted eligibility workers in Pescadero and Half Moon Bay, there has been no finger-imaging device available on the Coastside (a broken one was never replaced), so applicants had to go to San Carlos to complete this requirement (until a recent county decision which will allow all Coastside residents to postpone the finger-imaging requirement until recertification). Half Moon Bay residents are not extended automatic waivers of the face-to-face interview, and some do not know they can request one. Buses to reach the main HSA offices are indirect and infrequent; a one-way bus trip from Pescadero to Redwood City goes only once a day and takes at least 3.5 hours. With the out-posted eligibility workers rotating periodically, workers may have trouble gaining the trust of the community and raising awareness of the FSP on the Coastside. Residents and social service professionals on the Coastside report the absence of a consistent face of HSA or the FSP as a barrier to application for some eligible households.
- 4. No EBT vendors in Pescadero:** The two grocery stores on Main Street in Pescadero do not accept Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Pescadero residents who receive Food Stamps must travel 18 miles to Half Moon Bay or 35 miles to Santa Cruz to use their benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING BARRIERS

In order to make the FSP more accessible for eligible families, all levels of government must work together with community-based organizations to reduce and overcome these barriers. Below are some recommendations for changes that could help FSP-eligible households in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties gain access to the FSP:

I. Federal Government (USDA)

- 1. Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.):** Many applicants noted that they felt the FSP process was too “intrusive” and that they had to give up too much private information about themselves. Others spoke of the difficulty of obtaining all the documents needed to prove the information they gave the FSP office. USDA can reduce the necessary documentation, institute standard deduction amounts for all deductions, and allow trained community-based organizations to verify documents for outreach clients.
- 2. Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP:** The USDA’s Free and Reduced Lunch Program currently directly certifies children in households that receive Food Stamps in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties (the income eligibility for the FSP and Free Lunch are both 130% of the Federal Poverty Level). However, families already receiving Free Lunch are not directly certified into the FSP, partly because of restrictions on how information from the Free Lunch program is used. Creative partnerships between counties and school districts could overcome some of these barriers. USDA could highlight model partnerships and reduce some of the barriers in information sharing between these two programs.

II. State Government

- 1. Eliminate the Finger-Imaging Requirement:** California requires every adult FSP applicant to undergo finger-imaging in order to reduce fraud in the FSP. Yet California is one of only four states that require finger-imaging and every other state uses other methods of reducing fraud. Finger-imaging increases the stigma of the FSP, makes applicants feel that the process is “intrusive,” and, according to social service professionals, may lead to distrust of the FSP among immigrants. Furthermore, finger-imaging diverts county Food Stamp offices’ staff time and money from helping more people get the benefits they need.
- 2. Create a plan to move to simplified reporting, and reduce need for verification documents as part of reporting requirements:** USDA has denied California Department of Social Services’ (CDSS) requested long-term waiver of the simplified reporting requirement and demanded that CDSS create a plan to reduce the reporting requirements from quarterly to bi-annually. Such a plan would reduce the number of cases terminated because of failure to turn in the reports, and make it easier for those with fluctuating incomes to remain on the FSP. Reducing the verification documents needed during the bi-annual reports would also make it easier for FSP households to turn the forms in on time.

III. County Governments (Human Services Agency/Social Services Agency)

- 1. Increase funding for hiring of eligibility workers to streamline process in all county offices:** County Boards of Supervisors should increase funding for Human Services Agency (HSA)/Social Services Agency (SSA) offices so applications can be processed in the required 30-day period and eligibility workers can improve customer service care for applicants.
- 2. Opt-in to the state-wide waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households:** CDSS All County Letter 09-62 allowed counties to opt-in to a waiver of the face-to-face interview for all households, without a need to document hardship. Both counties should opt-in to this waiver in order to give “working-poor” households and others the opportunity to apply for the FSP over the phone.
- 3. Move to online application:** An online application would reduce barriers for applicants and workload for eligibility workers. Applicants could scan and submit their verification documents along with their application by email and receive a decision on their case without ever having to speak with an eligibility worker. San Francisco County and others in California already use an online application.
- 4. Institute clearer approval and denial letters, noting each person’s name who was denied and emphasizing that other family members could be eligible:** Current approval and denial letters can be confusing for mixed-immigration status families and other households where some members are ineligible while others are eligible. Clarifying these letters would prevent applicants from believing that the whole household is ineligible when in fact some members of the household have been approved for the FSP.
- 5. Extend open office hours at HSA/SSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full time:** Make it easier for working applicants to have their FSP appointment at a convenient time – outside of work and school pick-up/drop off times.
- 6. Provide training to all county workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns:** Some immigrant applicants reported hearing about negative repercussions of the FSP from their eligibility worker. Eligibility workers should not give out immigration advice. However, workers should have the correct information about immigrants’ concerns and should be able to point concerned applicants to easily accessible flyers and resources that can answer their questions.
- 7. Conduct sensitivity training for county workers:** Eligibility workers, like all social service professionals, should have sensitivity training to understand the hardships experienced by applicants in their day-to-day lives. One social service professional suggested that “poverty simulation” training would serve this purpose.
- 8. Increase Food Stamp 101 and 102 trainings for community-based organizations (CBOs):** Training community organizations about FSP process and eligibility will help them refer eligible clients to the FSP, and increase knowledge about the FSP in the entire community.
- 9. Eliminate Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) mandatory work requirement; institute voluntary FSET instead:** The state does not require counties to institute a mandatory FSET work

requirement for non-working FSP participants, but both counties have made FSET mandatory. A voluntary FSET would help those non-working FSP participants who felt they could benefit from employment training without penalizing those who wish to look for a job on their own.

IV. San Mateo County Human Services Agency

- 1. Pilot funding for one full-time eligibility worker placed in each Core Agency dedicated to FSP application assistance:** Core Agencies (geographic-based social service agencies throughout San Mateo County) already screen clients for many other services. By having an HSA eligibility worker in each agency, the caseworkers and eligibility worker could collaborate to streamline the FSP application process for eligible households. This would also better serve households hesitant to enter a government office.
- 2. Provide funding to allow full-time long-term out-posted eligibility workers in both Half Moon Bay and Pescadero and publicize their presence in community:** The county should provide funding for consistent and fairly-compensated out-posted eligibility workers on the Coastside, who can become trusted members of the community.
- 3. Expand language capabilities at North County HSA offices for Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Farsi, and Arabic and develop outreach materials in these languages:** Many applicants in this area need materials in their language. By improving access to translators for these populations, segments of the community which have been marginalized will be able to access needed services.

V. Santa Clara County Social Services Agency

- 1. Continue expanding and publicizing EBT Restaurant Program for homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP participants:** The restaurant program is helpful for eligible homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP participants who cannot cook for themselves. The program should be expanded to include more restaurants, with clear signs to delineate that the program is limited to specific populations.
- 2. Make FSP materials available in Chinese, Russian, Farsi, and Arabic in North and West Santa Clara County:** Many applicants in this area need materials in their language. By improving access to translators for these populations, segments of the community that have been marginalized will be able to access needed services.
- 3. Out-post county workers at CBOs in South County (especially Morgan Hill and San Martin):** Many FSP-eligible households in South County lack transportation. Residents of Morgan Hill and San Martin reported that getting to the Gilroy SSA office is a barrier. Out-posted eligibility workers in these communities would make FSP access easier, and better serve households hesitant to enter a government office.

VI. SHFB and Local Partners

- 1. All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB:** SHFB can make these materials part of all agency trainings and can send FSP flyers with each food distribution.
- 2. Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can attend county training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance:** Many service providers and agencies already collect information about clients in need of services. Gaining a basic understanding of the FSP eligibility requirements, learning how to use quick pre-screening tools like the FAST tool, and preparing eligible clients for their FSP appointment would allow these front-line safety net agencies to help those in need better navigate the FSP application process.
- 3. SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by counties and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods:** SHFB can become the central information center for FSP application assistance in the two counties, helping to “train the trainer” and cultivate knowledge about the FSP throughout the community.
- 4. SHFB, in collaboration with counties and local partners, can organize a pilot FSP “sign-up event,” where potential applicants are pre-screened, bring all their documents, have their questions answered, and then can apply with eligibility workers on the spot:** This event would help break down the barriers between “non-profit” and “government agency,” with both groups working together to help eligible families apply for the program. SHFB Food Stamp Outreach workers could help potential applicants obtain all the necessary verification documents beforehand. At the event, the outreach workers could answer questions and concerns of applicants as a group and individually. Then applicants could go into an adjoining room where county eligibility workers would be set up to process applications. This would be especially helpful in a community that is far from services (such as Half Moon Bay or Gilroy) and where people know each other and would feel comfortable applying with their neighbors (such as Santee).
- 5. SHFB can develop Food Stamp Outreach through radio, TV, and other non-print media:** TV, radio, and videos reach many people who cannot access print media. SHFB should utilize non-print mass media, especially Spanish TV and radio, to spread the word about the FSP, dispel some of the myths, and publicize income and benefit levels.
- 6. School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants:** Income guidelines for the FSP and Free Lunch are similar (130% FPL). Schools can target outreach toward Free Lunch recipients by putting information about the FSP and how to apply in the Free Lunch acceptance letters or menus. This is easy and free for the district. SHFB can provide the text for the letter.
- 7. Migrant Education Programs and Community Schools can publicize and pre-screen for FSP:** Many schools in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties have special programs that provide resources to low-income families. The staff of these resource centers can pre-screen families for the FSP and help eligible families apply.

- 8. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program can pre-screen potentially eligible families and help them apply for the FSP:** WIC, like the FSP, aims to help low-income families supplement their food budget with healthy foods. WIC is known as a successful and trusted government program, and many families who receive WIC may also be eligible for the FSP. WIC offices can publicize the FSP and encourage families who need extra help buying food to apply. WIC can also use the information received in intakes to pre-screen families and let them know how much they might receive in FSP benefits.
- 9. Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP:** Faith communities are the first place that some people turn for help. Clergy and community volunteers are trusted leaders who can help dispel some of the myths about the FSP and encourage eligible people to apply.
- 10. Hospital administrators and doctors can educate patients about the nutritional value of FSP and pre-screen eligible applicants:** Doctors are trusted advisors who can promote the FSP as a component of healthy living and access to nutrition. Their support will help reduce the “welfare” stigma associated with the FSP and publicize the health benefits of food security. Health care workers can quickly pre-screen households and refer them to SHFB or the county Food Stamp office to apply for the program.
- 11. Health Benefits Resource Centers can follow model of St. Louise Hospital in pre-screening for FSP eligibility:** Resource centers located in hospitals often help low-income patients apply for health insurance. St. Louise Hospital has taken the extra step to pre-screen and assist with applications for the FSP as well. Other resource centers can follow their lead.
- 12. Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge”:** Immigration advocates and legal experts are needed to spread the word that the FSP will not impact recipients’ current or future immigration status. These advocates can attend SHFB outreach events and FSP informational sessions to help answer legal questions. They can also encourage fellow immigration lawyers to dispense accurate information about the FSP and immigration status.
- 13. Local residents can encourage local stores to accept EBT and provide equal treatment to EBT users:** In isolated areas like the San Mateo County Coastside, local residents can pressure local store-owners to accept EBT. Stores with a reputation of poor treatment of EBT users should be pressured to create clear policies about equal treatment and should be held accountable for following them.
- 14. Local residents and partner agencies can encourage restaurants to sign up for the EBT Restaurant Meal Program:** Homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP recipients in Santa Clara County are eligible for the EBT Restaurant Meal Program, where they can use their EBT card at select restaurants to buy cooked meals. However, few can take advantage of this program because only four restaurants in the county currently accept EBT. Local residents can encourage their local low-budget restaurants (Subway, Quiznos, etc.) to begin to accept EBT from homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP participants who cannot cook for themselves.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The interviews and surveys conducted for this project identified specific barriers to FSP access and referenced the individual stories of potentially-eligible households in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties to describe the road blocks that prevent them from accessing needed food resources. However, the data collected was not a random sample and does not provide an objective assessment of FSP access barriers. Further study is needed to quantify the anecdotal and qualitative evidence presented here.

A future study could survey non-participating FSP-eligible households and assess which barriers are the most widespread and which impact the largest segments of the eligible population. A more complex analysis of how various factors (age, race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, and past work experience) impact an individual's experience of those barriers would also contribute to a more detailed understanding of low FSP participation rates. Statistical study of how specific public policies (such as finger-imaging or the FSET requirement) impact participation rates would help direct future policy and advocacy efforts.

Finally, an assessment of Second Harvest Food Bank's Food Stamp Outreach efforts could point to areas of success and areas for potential improvement. This study would identify the outreach strategies that reach the most people, as well as the strategies that build more long term trust of the FSP and the Food Bank throughout the community. The information gained from such a study could guide SHFB in marshalling the support and involvement of local partners to increase FSP participation in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.



CONCLUSION

The Food Stamp Program is a vital safety net for Santa Clara County and San Mateo County residents and an important generator of local economic activity. Thousands of local households who might otherwise go hungry are able to put food on the table using their FSP benefits. These households overwhelmingly report the importance of the FSP in giving them the freedom to buy the nutritious and culturally appropriate food that they need to live active and healthy lives. At the same time, the low-income residents who use their EBT cards to buy food in local stores also contribute to the community by bringing federal dollars into the local economy, creating jobs and stimulating growth.

Yet despite the large increase in the numbers of people turning to the FSP for help as a result of the recession, many eligible households have not yet accessed this important program. Behind the low participation rates in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties lie thousands of low-income households struggling to survive without the assistance they need (and to which they are entitled), as well as hundreds of millions of dollars of potential economic stimulus lost.



Understanding the barriers that prevent eligible applicants from applying for the FSP is the first step to increasing FSP participation. This report has given voice to the hardships and concerns of potentially FSP-eligible individuals, detailing the lack of knowledge about the program, the difficulty and intrusiveness of the application process, and the myths that make many immigrants fearful of applying, among other barriers. By documenting these barriers, the report hopes to provide anecdotal evidence of the ways in which the FSP is inaccessible to many eligible households.

The next step is to make changes. Decision makers at all levels of government (federal, state, county, and local) can enact policy changes, including reducing required verifications and reporting, streamlining the application process, and increasing funding and support for county Food Stamp offices that will make the FSP more accessible to the many eligible non-participants. Community-based organizations and local partners can increase their knowledge and involvement in the FSP and coordinate concerted outreach efforts towards populations such as immigrants, communities with low-literacy, and WIC recipients. Second Harvest Food Bank is and can continue to be a leader in this process, bringing together local partners and government agencies to find ways to overcome FSP access barriers, raise awareness of hunger and poverty in the community, and help low-income households access the programs they need.

APPENDIX A:

Questions for Partner Agencies:

Agency Name: _____

Professional's Name and Title: _____

1. What is your agency's mission? What services do you provide?
2. What population(s) do you serve?
3. Do you do any work with food stamps? If so, what?
4. What do you hear from clients about food stamps? What do you think are barriers to applying?
5. How is the local support for food stamps? (ie. Location of intake office, transportation, availability of EBT-friendly supermarkets, publicity, etc.)
6. Have Food Stamp Outreach workers from the food bank visited your site? What is your impression of their success?
7. In an ideal world, what measures would be in place to encourage food stamp participation?
8. How can SHFB help remove some of the barriers and encourage participation among your clients?
9. Would staff from your agency be interested in training to do food stamp outreach or pre-screening?
10. Any other suggestions/thoughts/ideas?
11. Can I contact you with further questions?
Contact info:

APPENDIX B:



Food Stamp Survey

(Past Applicant)

Santa Clara County
750 Curtner Avenue
San José, CA 95125-2118
408.266.8866 ph
408.266.9042 fax

San Mateo County
1051 Bing Street
San Carlos, CA 94070-5320
650.610.0800 ph
650.610.0808 fax

If you receive Food Stamps now or have applied for Food Stamps in the past please complete THIS survey. If you have never applied for Food Stamps, complete the survey on the BACK of this form. Thanks!

1. How did you find out about Food Stamps?

2. Did you get help applying from Second Harvest Food Bank?

3. Was the Food Stamp application process easy or difficult?
Explain:

4. Did you have trouble getting to the Food Stamp office for your interview?

5. Which parts of the Food Stamp process did you find confusing?

6. Are you getting Food Stamps now? Why or why not?

7. Would you recommend the Food Stamp program to a friend? Why or why not?

8. Are you willing to talk more on the phone with a Second Harvest Food Bank staff member?
We are trying to understand why people don't apply for Food Stamps. Your information will be totally confidential and WILL NOT be shared with the government. Your answers will help us make the Food Stamp program better! **If YES, please write your name and phone number**



Food Stamp Survey

(Never Applied Before)

Santa Clara County
750 Curtner Avenue
San José, CA 95125-2118
408.266.8866 ph
408.266.9042 fax

San Mateo County
1051 Bing Street
San Carlos, CA 94070-5320
650.610.0800 ph
650.610.0808 fax

If you have never applied for Food Stamps, complete THIS survey.

If you receive Food Stamps now or have applied for Food Stamps in the past please complete the survey on the **BACK of this form.**

1. Do you get help with food for your family? If yes, from where?
2. Do you think you are eligible for Food Stamps? Why or why not?
3. Why have you not applied for Food Stamps?
4. What have you heard – good or bad - about applying or being on Food Stamps? From who?
5. What can be changed to make you apply for Food Stamps?
6. Would you like to apply, learn more, or know if you qualify for Food Stamps?

**If YES, please write your name and phone number:
(A staff member from Second Harvest Food Bank will contact you)**

7. Are you willing to talk more on the phone with a Second Harvest Food Bank staff member? We are trying to understand why people don't apply for Food Stamps. Your information will be totally confidential and WILL NOT be shared with the government. Your answers will help us make the Food Stamp program better! **If YES, please write your name and phone number:**



Encuesta De Estampillas De Comida

(Solicitante Pasado)

Santa Clara County
750 Curtner Avenue
San José, CA 95125-2118
408.266.8866 ph
408.266.9042 fax

San Mateo County
1051 Bing Street
San Carlos, CA 94070-5320
650.610.0800 ph
650.610.0808 fax

Si recibe estampillas de comida ahora o ha solicitado estampillas en el pasado for favor complete esta encuesta. Si nunca ha solicitado las estampillas de comida, por favor complete la encuesta en el reverso de este formulario.

1. Como se entero de las estampillas de comida?
2. Recibio ayuda del Banco de Comida para llenar su solicitud de estampillas para comida?
3. Fue facil o dificil el proceso de solicitud para estampillas de comida?
Porque:
4. Tuvo problemas de transportacion el dia de su entrevista de estampillas?
5. Que parte del proceso para obtener estampillas de comida encontro confuso?
6. Esta recibiendo las estampillas de comida ahora? Porque si o porque no?
7. Le recomendaria el programa de estampillas de comida a un amigo? Porque si o porque no?
8. Esta usted dispuesto en hablar mas con un miembro de personal del Banco de Comida?
Nosotros queremos saber porque la gente no solicita las estampillas de comida. Su informacion sera confidencial y no sera compartida con el gobierno. Sus respuestas nos ayudaran a mejorar el programa de estampillas.

Si le gustaria hablar mas con nosotros sobre su experiencia, escriba su nombre y numero de telefono, y alguien se pondra en contacto con usted.



Encuesta De Estampillas de Comida

(Para personas que nunca han aplicado)

Santa Clara County
750 Curtner Avenue
San José, CA 95125-2118
408.266.8866 ph
408.266.9042 fax

San Mateo County
1051 Bing Street
San Carlos, CA 94070-5320
650.610.0800 ph
650.610.0808 fax

Si nunca ha aplicado para estampillas de comida por favor complete esta encuesta.

Si esta recibiendo estampillas de comida ahorita o ha solicitado estampillas en el pasado por favor complete la encuesta en el reverso de este formulario.

1. Recibe usted ayuda con comida para su familia? De donde?
2. Usted cree que califica para las estampillas de comida? Porque si o porque no?
3. Porque no ha solicitado las estampillas de comida?
4. Que ha escuchado, bueno o malo, sobre solicitar o recibir las estampillas de comida? De quien ha oido esto?
5. Que debe cambiar para que usted quiera solicitar las estampillas?
6. Le gustaria solicitar, saber mas sobre el programa, o saber si califica para estampillas de comida?

Si si le gustaria, por favor escriba su nombre y numero de telefono y alguien del banco de comida se pondra en contacto con usted.

7. Esta usted dispuesto en hablar con un miembro de personal del Banco de Comida? Nosotros queremos saber porque la gente no solicita las estampillas de comida. Su informacion sera confidencial y no sera compartida con el gobierno. Sus respuestas nos ayudaran a mejorar el programa de estampillas.

Si si le gustaria, por favor escriba su nombre y numero de telefono y alguien del banco de comida se pondra en contacto con usted



Food Stamp Barriers

South Santa Clara County



INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).¹ Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **the FSP combats hunger using federally-funded benefits to help low-income Californians buy nutritious food.** Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. The FSP is a life-saving component of Santa Clara County's social safety net. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. **In Santa Clara County, FSP participants increased by 23%, meaning that almost 80,000 people in the county now receive food assistance through the FSP.**²

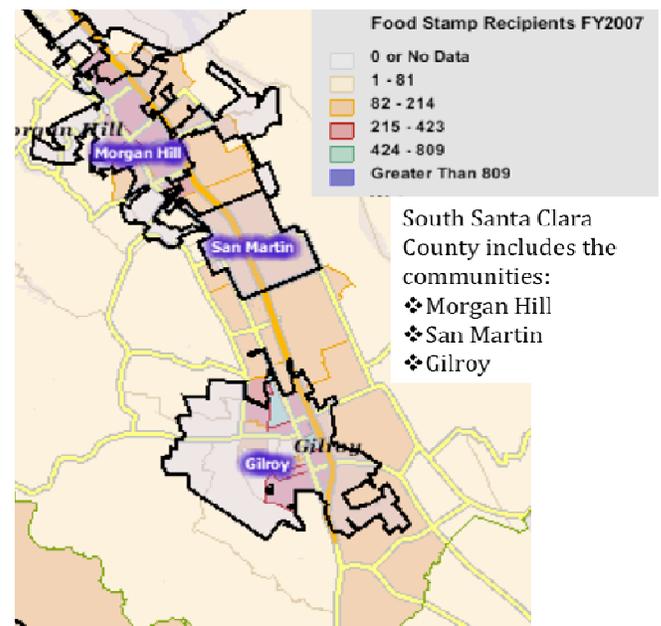
Yet many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. California Food Policy Advocates estimates that **only 39% of income-eligible people in Santa Clara County receive Food Stamps, leading to a loss of nearly \$225 million in potential local economic activity** spurred by federal dollars.³

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has been helping eligible households apply for the FSP since February 2008. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by SHFB food recipients, SHFB has developed recommendations to increase FSP participation. This issue brief will zero-in on South Santa Clara County, detailing some of the specific barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. It will suggest some policy and programmatic changes to help low-income South County households access needed support, and provide economic benefit for the entire community.

SOUTH SANTA CLARA COUNTY

South Santa Clara County centers on the city of Gilroy, the "Garlic Capital of the World," and also includes the smaller communities of Morgan Hill and unincorporated San Martin. Many migrant farm-workers join the more permanent factory-working population during the growing season. Some suburbanites also choose to live here and commute to San Jose. According to census data, **about 12% of South Santa Clara County residents live at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) – the income guideline for most FSP households. Of these, less than 57% are actually receiving Food Stamps.**⁴

Food Stamp Recipients in South Santa Clara County (2007)



Source: Network for a Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

² California Budget Project. <http://www.cbp.org>

³ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

⁴ Based on analysis of census data using Network for Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

BARRIERS

1. Isolation: South County's geographic isolation from the rest of the county makes it difficult to access many services. The South County Social Service Agency (SSA) office in Gilroy serves FSP applicants in South County, but **the wait for an appointment can be 3-4 weeks – those who need quicker service must travel to San Jose.** Confusion about which office to go to, in addition to irregular bus service, sometimes leads to missed appointments.

“Food Stamps were a blessing. But confusing. They told me that I had to go to San Jose. I didn't understand – the first time I had gotten them here in Gilroy.”

- A homeless man from Gilroy, explaining why he missed his FSP appointment.

2. Immigration Fears: The economy of South County depends on a large number of migrant farm- and factory-workers, many of whom have US citizen children who are eligible for the FSP. But many immigrants have heard that the FSP has negative repercussions. The myth that receiving Food Stamps makes one a “public charge” and will impact immigration status persists even among legal immigrants, as do other insidious rumors.

“These women have a two-pronged fear of Food Stamps. One – that they'll be picked up by ICE, and two – that it will jeopardize their future attempts at legalization.”

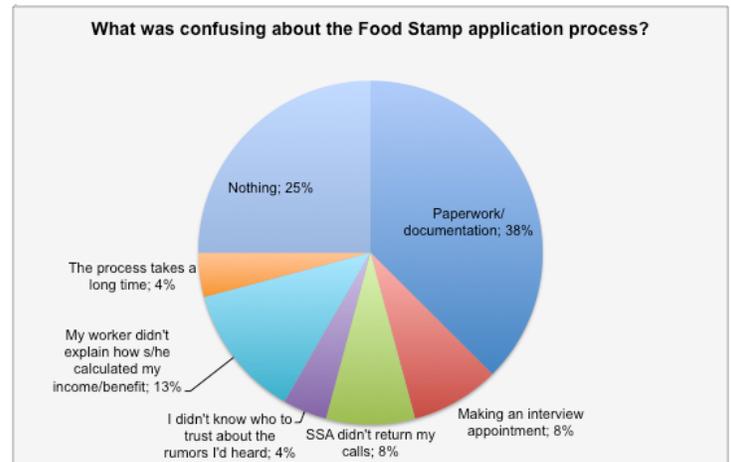
- A staff member at a Morgan Hill-based agency

3. Stigma: The recent recession has led many previously-stable families to seek out financial and food assistance. But the FSP still carries a stigma for those who connect it with welfare. Additionally, **the fingerprinting requirement adds to the stigma and creates a perception of criminalization among those applying for the FSP.**

4. Homeless Population: More than 600 homeless individuals live in Gilroy, with no permanent shelter (the armory opens only during the winter months). To apply and remain on the FSP, homeless households must continue returning to the SSA office to “check their mail.” If they miss a quarterly report, benefits are terminated. Homeless FSP recipients without cooking facilities are not able to participate in the EBT Restaurant Program because at current there are no participating restaurants in Gilroy.

5. Verification Documents and Quarterly Reports: Literacy levels in some segments of the South County community are very low. Obtaining all the documentation necessary to verify claims of income and deductions is a significant barrier for these households. Filling out quarterly reports without any assistance can be near impossible. Additionally, many members of the Oaxacan community speak a different Spanish dialect, making the interview and verification process even more difficult.

6. Gilroy SSA Office funding: The reduced funding and low number of consistent staff at the Gilroy office has made some clients confused about who to contact with questions throughout the process. One FSP recipient had to meet with three Gilroy SSA eligibility workers and come to the office five times to return various documentation before finally having her case approved.



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 2 Community Agencies in South Santa Clara County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.)
- Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP.

State

- Eliminate the finger-imaging requirement
- Create a plan to move to simplified reporting, and reduce need for verification documents as part of reporting requirements.

Santa Clara County (Social Services Agency)

- Funding for consistent and increased numbers of staff at South County SSA office
- Out-post county workers at Community-based organizations (CBOs) in South County (especially Morgan Hill and San Martin)
- Extend open office hours at SSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full time
- Opt-in to the state-wide waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households, without need to document hardship (as per CDSS All County Letter 09-62)
- Move to online application
- Provide training to workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns
- Conduct sensitivity training (ie. “poverty simulation”) for county workers
- Continue expansion and publicizing of EBT Restaurant Program for homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP participants
- Increase training opportunities for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to learn about the FSP and assist in pre-screening and application assistance.

“We don’t want to give the welfare stigma to our program. Food Stamp Outreach might make people nervous about coming back or angry that the church is connected with the government.”

- The pastor of a South County church explaining his hesitation to talk about the FSP with clients of his food pantry

Local Partners

- Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can attend county training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance
- All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB
- SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by county and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods
- SHFB can develop outreach through radio, TV, and other non-print media for low-literacy eligible households
- SHFB, in collaboration with county HSA and local partners, can organize pilot FSP “sign-up event,” where potential applicants are pre-screened, bring all their documents, have their questions answered, and then can apply with eligibility workers on the spot
- Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP
- Interfaith Council can promote FSP access and advocacy
- Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge”
- Hospital administrators and doctors can educate patients about the nutritional value of FSP and pre-screen eligible applicants
- Health Benefits Resource Centers can follow model of St. Louise Hospital in pre-screening for FSP eligibility
- School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants
- Superintendents of school districts can open up classroom space for use for FSP outreach
- Migrant Education Program can publicize and pre-screen for FSP
- Local residents and partner agencies can encourage restaurants to sign up for EBT Restaurant Meal Program

Eligibility for federal nutrition programs is generally based on household income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For some programs, applicants have to prove their eligibility with verification documents. Refer to the charts below that outline the income eligibility and verification documents required for each of four programs. The FSP is the most restrictive for income and number of documents required of applicant households.

Income Eligibility and Verification Documentation Required for Four Federal Nutrition Programs:

Programs	Food Stamp Program (SNAP)	USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program	National School Lunch Program	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Income Eligibility	< 130% FPL (gross income limit) < 100% FPL (net income limit)	< 150% FPL	< 185% FPL (reduced lunch) < 130% FPL (free lunch)	< 185% FPL
Verification Documents Required to Prove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income ▪ Social Security Number ▪ Naturalization papers (if applicable) ▪ Utility Bills ▪ Medical Expenses ▪ Child Care or Adult Care expenses (if applicable) ▪ Disability (if applicable) ▪ Child Support Payments (if applicable) ▪ Bank Statements (may be requested by county) ▪ Shelter Costs (may be requested by county) ▪ Household size (may be requested by county) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income 	None. Only a signature is required in most cases (except for 3% of families who are selected as a random sample in each school district and must provide proof of income)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income

Dollar Amounts Corresponding to Income Eligibility (effective through June 30, 2010)⁵

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	100% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL	FOOD STAMPS, FREE SCHOOL MEALS (130% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		USDA EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (150% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC), REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS (185% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)	
	ANNUAL	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY
1	10,830	14,079	1,174	16,245	1,354	20,036	1,670
2	14,570	18,941	1,579	21,855	1,821	26,955	2,247
3	18,310	23,803	1,984	27,465	2,289	33,874	2,823
4	22,050	28,665	2,389	33,075	2,756	40,793	3,400
5	25,790	33,527	2,794	38,685	3,224	47,712	3,976
6	29,530	38,389	3,200	44,295	3,691	54,631	4,553
For each add'l member, add	3,740	4,862	406	5,610	468	6,919	577

Second Harvest Food Bank thanks the following local partners for their commitment to the FSP and looks forward to working together to increase FSP access in South County:

Emergency Housing Consortium, Gilroy Unified School District, Living and Loving Education Center, Salvation Army Gilroy, Santa Clara County Health Department, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, South County Collaborative, South County Housing - Monterra Village Apartments, St. Joseph's Family Center, St. Louise Hospital Health Benefits Resource Center (Food Stamp Outreach partner)

⁵ Food Stamp Program (SNAP) income guidelines are effective through September 30, 2010.



Food Stamp Barriers

Central Santa Clara County



INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).¹ Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **the FSP combats hunger using federally-funded benefits to help low-income Californians buy nutritious food.** Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. The FSP is a life-saving component of Santa Clara County's social safety net. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. **In Santa Clara County, FSP participants increased by 23%, meaning that almost 80,000 people in the county now receive food assistance through the FSP.**²

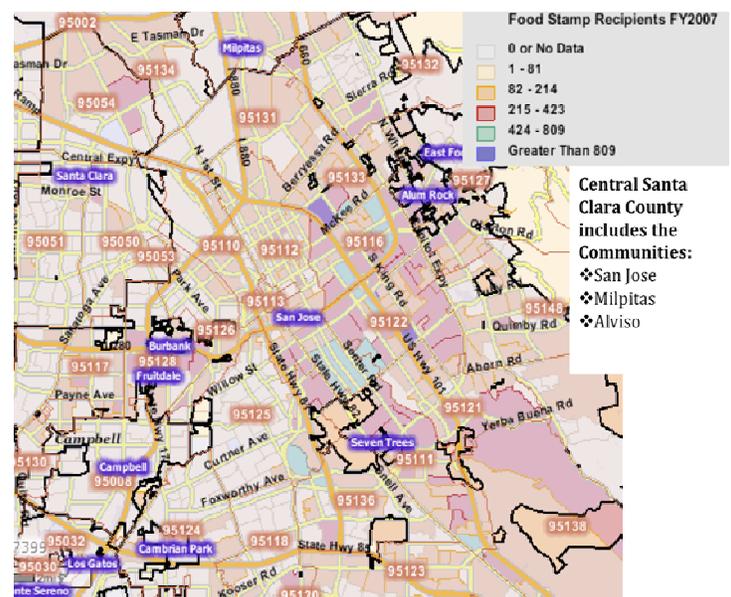
Yet many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. California Food Policy Advocates estimates that **only 39% of income-eligible people in Santa Clara County receive Food Stamps, leading to a loss of nearly \$225 million in potential local economic activity** spurred by federal dollars.³

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has been helping eligible households apply for the FSP since February 2008. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by SHFB food recipients, SHFB has developed recommendations to increase FSP participation. This issue brief will focus on Central Santa Clara County, detailing some of the specific barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. It will suggest some policy and programmatic changes to help low-income Santa Clara County households access needed support, and provide economic benefit for the entire community.

CENTRAL SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Central Santa Clara County is dominated by the city of San Jose, the most populous city in Silicon Valley. San Jose also includes most of the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of residents living below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in Santa Clara County, including one census tract with more than 40% of residents in this category. According to census data, **about 12% of Central Santa Clara residents live at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) – the income guideline for most FSP households. Of these, less than 51% are actually receiving Food Stamps.**⁴

Food Stamp Recipients in Central Santa Clara County (2007)



Source: Network for a Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

² California Budget Project. <http://www.cbp.org>

³ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

⁴ Based on analysis of census data using Network for Healthy California GIS Map (<http://cnnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

BARRIERS

1. Immigration Fears: Though undocumented immigrants are not eligible for the FSP, any member of the household who is a US Citizen can apply. Many of the FSP-eligible households in San Jose are from mixed-immigration status families. Some are worried that applying will impact other family members; **others have heard myths that their children will have to pay the benefits back, or will be taken to the army when they reach 18.** In addition, the myth that receiving Food Stamps makes one a “public charge” and will negatively impact recipients when they apply to become citizens persists even among legal immigrants.

“The application process was easy. But I didn’t like the fingerprinting. That was intrusive.”

- A San Jose resident and FSP participant

2. Drug Felon Ineligibility: Individuals who have been convicted of a drug felony (related to sale of illegal drugs) are ineligible for the FSP for the rest of their life. Drug charges are the only felony which carry this punishment; other felons in California may still be eligible. For those who have served time and are trying to rebuild their lives, lack of access to food resources can be devastating. This rule also punishes the rest of a drug felon’s household, who must count his/her income but cannot count the felon as a member of the Food Stamp household. Drug felon ineligibility seems to impact more households in San Jose than in other parts of the county.

3. Low Literacy: Food Stamp Outreach has generally been done through flyers, posters, and written information. While this method works for some, many FSP-eligible people in San Jose suffer from low literacy. Even if these individuals do find out about the FSP, filling out an application on their own may be an insurmountable barrier.

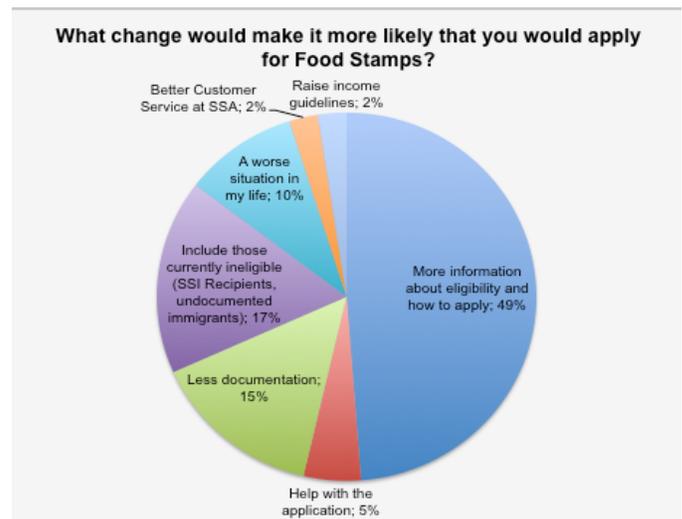
“It’s not a culture of literacy, it’s a culture of face-to-face. It’s a culture of narrative.”

- Director of a faith-based food pantry, explaining why written brochures are not always an effective method of outreach in the Latino community

4. Verification Documents and Quarterly Reporting:

The complicated process of providing verification documents for identity, income, rent, child care, and other bills is a significant barrier to completing the FSP application process. It takes many households weeks to pull together the necessary documentation, and others simply become discouraged and give up. County eligibility workers often cannot assist households that are having trouble providing all their verifications. Additionally, many households don’t know that some verification documents can be replaced by an affidavit or other method; if they can’t obtain these documents, they may unnecessarily withdraw their application.

5. Unclear Denial and Approval Letters: Some applicants have reported confusion over the denial letters from the County SSA. When mixed-status immigrant families apply for the FSP, they receive a denial letter for each member of the family who is an ineligible undocumented immigrant. Some receive this letter before they have submitted all their documentation and so believe that their entire family has been denied. One county eligibility worker notes receiving calls from worried families who are confused and do not know that their children have been deemed eligible, even if the parents have been denied. But other families simply give up, never return the necessary documents, and their cases are closed.



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 5 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in Central Santa Clara County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.)
- Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP.

State

- Eliminate the finger-imaging requirement
- Create a plan to move to simplified reporting (bi-annual), and reduce need for verification documents as part of reporting requirements.

Santa Clara County (Social Services Agency)

- Extend open office hours at SSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full time
- Opt-in to the state-wide waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households, without need to document hardship (as per CDSS All County Letter 09-62)
- Move to online application
- Provide training to workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns
- Conduct sensitivity training (ie. “poverty simulation”) for county workers
- Institute clearer approval and denial letters, noting each person’s name who was denied and emphasizing that other family members could be eligible
- Increase training opportunities for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to learn about the FSP and assist in pre-screening and application assistance.
- Continue expansion and publicizing of EBT Restaurant Program for homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP participants

Local Partners

- Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can undergo training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance
- All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB
- SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by county and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods
- SHFB can develop outreach through radio, TV, and other non-print media
- SHFB, in collaboration with county SSA and local partners, can organize pilot FSP “sign-up event,” in local neighborhoods (ie. Santee) where potential applicants are pre-screened, bring all their documents, have their questions answered, and then can apply with eligibility workers on the spot
- Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP
- Interfaith Council can promote FSP access and advocacy
- Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge”
- Hospital administrators and doctors can educate patients about the nutritional value of FSP and pre-screen eligible applicants
- San Jose city government can provide public space for parking of SHFB’s Food Stamp Outreach mobile unit
- SHFB and local groups can coordinate FSP outreach with local WIC offices
- School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants
- Superintendents of school districts can open up classroom space for use for FSP outreach



Eligibility for federal nutrition programs is generally based on household income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For some programs, applicants have to prove their eligibility with verification documents. Refer to the charts below that outline the income eligibility and verification documents required for each of four programs. The FSP is the most restrictive for income and number of documents required of applicant households.

Income Eligibility and Verification Documentation Required for Four Federal Nutrition Programs:

Programs	Food Stamp Program (SNAP)	USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program	National School Lunch Program	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Income Eligibility	< 130% FPL (gross income limit) < 100% FPL (net income limit)	< 150% FPL	< 185% FPL (reduced lunch) < 130% FPL (free lunch)	< 185% FPL
Verification Documents Required to Prove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income ▪ Social Security Number ▪ Naturalization papers (if applicable) ▪ Utility Bills ▪ Medical Expenses ▪ Child Care or Adult Care expenses (if applicable) ▪ Disability (if applicable) ▪ Child Support Payments (if applicable) ▪ Bank Statements (may be requested by county) ▪ Shelter Costs (may be requested by county) ▪ Household size (may be requested by county) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income 	<p>None. Only a signature is required in most cases (except for 3% of families who are selected as a random sample in each school district and must provide proof of income)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income

Dollar Amounts Corresponding to Income Eligibility (effective through June 30, 2010)⁵

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	100% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL	FOOD STAMPS, FREE SCHOOL MEALS (130% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		USDA EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (150% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC), REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS (185% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)	
	ANNUAL	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY
1	10,830	14,079	1,174	16,245	1,354	20,036	1,670
2	14,570	18,941	1,579	21,855	1,821	26,955	2,247
3	18,310	23,803	1,984	27,465	2,289	33,874	2,823
4	22,050	28,665	2,389	33,075	2,756	40,793	3,400
5	25,790	33,527	2,794	38,685	3,224	47,712	3,976
6	29,530	38,389	3,200	44,295	3,691	54,631	4,553
For each add'l member, add	3,740	4,862	406	5,610	468	6,919	577

Second Harvest Food Bank thanks the following local partners for their commitment to the FSP and looks forward to working together to increase FSP access in Central Santa Clara County: C.O.M.E. Lutheran, Catholic Charities, First Presbyterian Church of San Jose, InnVision, Loaves and Fishes, Sacred Heart Community Services, Salvation Army, San Jose Presbytery, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, Santa Maria Urban Ministry, Silicon Valley Medical-Legal Partnership, South Bay Labor Council (At Work), Step Up Silicon Valley, Valley Medical Center

⁵ Food Stamp Program (SNAP) income guidelines are effective through September 30, 2010



Food Stamp Barriers

North and West Santa Clara County



INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).¹ Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **the FSP combats hunger using federally-funded benefits to help low-income Californians buy nutritious food.** Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. The FSP is a life-saving component of Santa Clara County's social safety net. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. **In Santa Clara County, FSP participants increased by 23%, meaning that almost 80,000 people in the county now receive food assistance through the FSP.**²

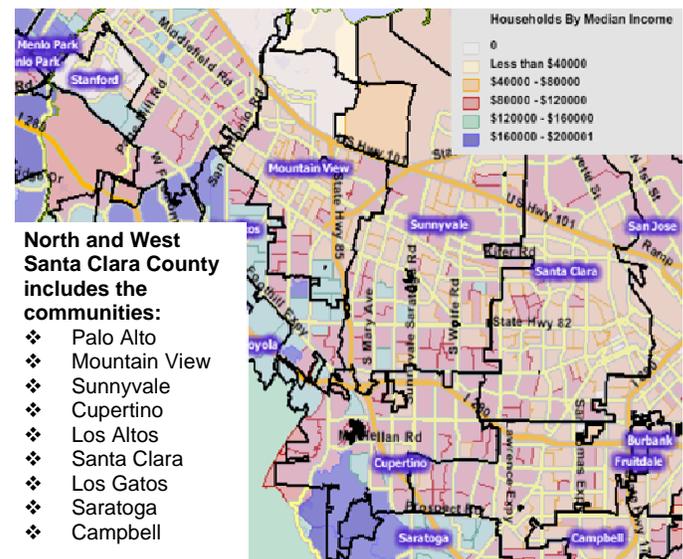
Yet many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. California Food Policy Advocates estimates that **only 39% of income-eligible people in Santa Clara County receive Food Stamps, leading to a loss of nearly \$225 million in potential local economic activity** spurred by federal dollars.³

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has been helping eligible households apply for the FSP since February 2008. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by SHFB food recipients, SHFB has developed recommendations to increase FSP participation. This issue brief will zero-in on North Santa Clara County, detailing some of the specific barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. It will suggest some policy and programmatic changes to help low-income Santa Clara County households access needed support, and provide economic benefit for the entire community.

NORTH AND WEST SANTA CLARA COUNTY

North and West Santa Clara County houses the heart of the Silicon Valley Hi-Tech industry and much of the wealth that it has created. Yet low-income people continue to live throughout these communities, sometimes hidden among their more prosperous neighbors. Well-organized and focused community services agencies serve those in need in each community. According to census data, about **8% of North and West Santa Clara residents live at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)** – the income guideline for most FSP households. **Of these, less than 28% are actually receiving Food Stamps.**⁴

Median Household Income in North and West Santa Clara County



Source: Network for a Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

² California Budget Project. <http://www.cbp.org>

³ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

⁴ Based on analysis of census data using Network for Healthy California GIS Map (<http://cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

BARRIERS

1. Isolated Poverty: North and West Santa Clara County houses some of the wealthiest communities in the country. The pockets of poverty in this area are often hidden and isolated. In some areas, such as Cupertino, a lack of county services and infrequent public transportation make it very difficult for low-income households to access needed services. The SSA North County office in Mountain View is efficient, friendly, and a huge help for those who live nearby, but is not easily accessible to those who live in communities further south. In addition, because low-income individuals in North and West County are dispersed throughout the area, knowledge about social services, including FSP, is lower than in other areas of concentrated poverty.

"I had to return three days in a row to see if I qualified for emergency food stamps. One day I had to sleep outside the office because I couldn't make it back and forth to the friend who was letting me stay with him. It doesn't seem like they want to help the homeless."

– A homeless man, describing the hardship he faced in applying for the FSP

2. Immigration Fears: Some immigrants in North and West County feel unsafe entering a government office. According to the director of a local community services agency, even **some local immigration attorneys have spread misinformation, telling people to "stay away from anything official."** This has perpetuated the myth that receiving Food Stamps makes one a "public charge" and will impact the recipients' immigration status.

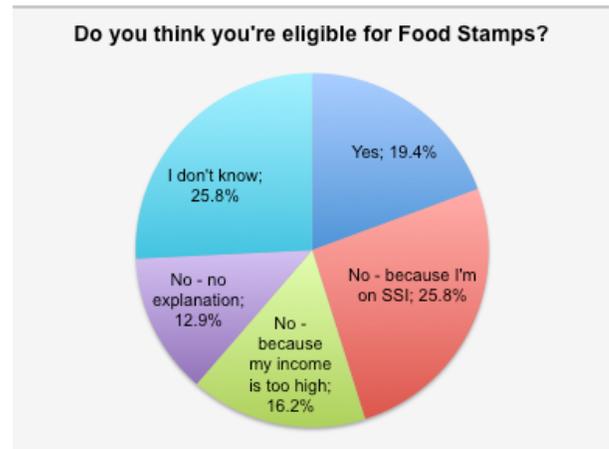
"We haven't yet come across a way to convince people that it's safe to go into that office."

- Director of a local community services agency

3. Stigma: Living among wealthy neighbors can make asking for financial assistance very embarrassing. The recent recession has led many previously-stable families to seek out food assistance, but some don't want their neighbors to know they need help. They would rather go quietly to a food pantry than use a special card at the supermarket, where everyone can see. **The finger-imaging requirement only adds to the shame many feel when asking for help by making FSP applicants feel like criminals.**

4. Language: North and West County is home to many immigrant communities not represented elsewhere in the county, such as Chinese, Russian, and Middle-Eastern immigrants. Outreach materials often don't exist in their native languages, and many members of these communities do not speak English. Some don't know that they can request translators for their Food Stamp appointment, and so are hesitant to apply. **Others receive their quarterly report or other letters from the SSA office and cannot understand them; if they don't know how to find help, some may be removed from the FSP without knowing.**

5. SSI Cash-Out: California is the only state which denies SSI-recipients access to the FSP by including additional income ("cash-out") as part of those individuals' SSI income. Many of the low-income people in North and West County are seniors who are ineligible for the FSP because they receive SSI. Yet the "cash-out" they receive from SSI is inadequate to cover their food and other expenses. **Ironically, their SSI fixed income is often some \$300 less than the FSP gross-income guidelines; so without this rule, they might be eligible for the maximum Food Stamp benefit.** Instead, they rely on Second Harvest Food Bank's Brown Bag program and other food pantries for food assistance.



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 2 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in North and West Santa Clara County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.)
- Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP.

State

- Eliminate the finger-imaging requirement
- Create a plan to move to simplified reporting (bi-annual), and reduce need for verification documents as part of reporting requirements.

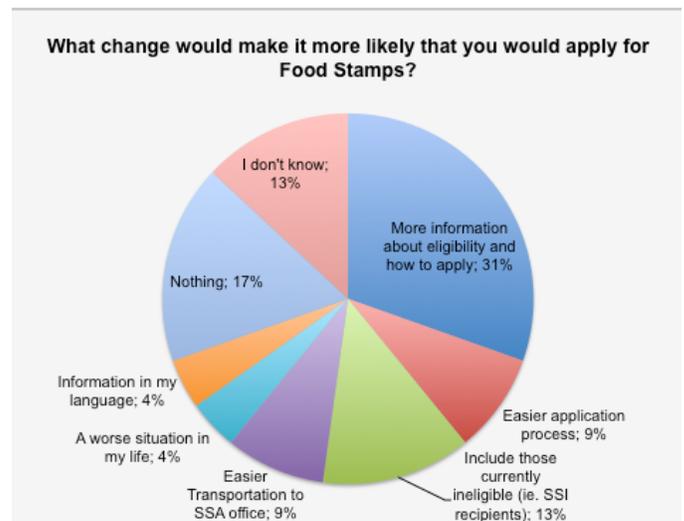
Santa Clara County (Social Services Agency)

- Extend open office hours at SSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full time
- Opt-in to the state-wide waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households, without need to document hardship (as per CDSS All County Letter 09-62)
- Move to online application
- Provide training to workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns
- Conduct sensitivity training (ie. “poverty simulation”) for county workers
- Continue expansion and publicizing of EBT Restaurant Program for homeless, disabled, and elderly FSP participants
- Make available materials for FSP in Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, Farsi, and Arabic
- Increase training opportunities for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to learn about the FSP and assist in pre-screening and application assistance.

Local Partners

- Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can undergo training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance
- All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB

- SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by county and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods
- SHFB can develop outreach through radio, TV, and other non-print media
- SHFB, in collaboration with county SSA and local partners, can organize pilot FSP “sign-up event,” in local neighborhoods where potential applicants are pre-screened, bring all their documents, have their questions answered, and then can apply with eligibility workers on the spot
- Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP
- Interfaith Council can promote FSP access and advocacy



- Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge”
- Hospital administrators and doctors can educate patients about the nutritional value of FSP and pre-screen eligible applicants
- School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants
- Superintendents of school districts can open up classroom space for use for FSP outreach

Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 2 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in North and West Santa Clara County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Eligibility for federal nutrition programs is generally based on household income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For some programs, applicants have to prove their eligibility with verification documents. Refer to the charts below that outline the income eligibility and verification documents required for each of four programs. The FSP is the most restrictive for income and number of documents required of applicant households.

Income Eligibility and Verification Documentation Required for Four Federal Nutrition Programs:

Programs	Food Stamp Program (SNAP)	USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program	National School Lunch Program	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Income Eligibility	< 130% FPL (gross income limit) < 100% FPL (net income limit)	< 150% FPL	< 185% FPL (reduced lunch) < 130% FPL (free lunch)	< 185% FPL
Verification Documents Required to Prove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income ▪ Social Security Number ▪ Naturalization papers (if applicable) ▪ Utility Bills ▪ Medical Expenses ▪ Child Care or Adult Care expenses (if applicable) ▪ Disability (if applicable) ▪ Child Support Payments (if applicable) ▪ Bank Statements (may be requested by county) ▪ Shelter Costs (may be requested by county) ▪ Household size (may be requested by county) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income 	<p>None. Only a signature is required in most cases (except for 3% of families who are selected as a random sample in each school district and must provide proof of income)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income

Dollar Amounts Corresponding to Income Eligibility (effective through June 30, 2010)⁵

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	100% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL	FOOD STAMPS, FREE SCHOOL MEALS (130% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		USDA EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (150% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC), REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS (185% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)	
	ANNUAL	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY
1	10,830	14,079	1,174	16,245	1,354	20,036	1,670
2	14,570	18,941	1,579	21,855	1,821	26,955	2,247
3	18,310	23,803	1,984	27,465	2,289	33,874	2,823
4	22,050	28,665	2,389	33,075	2,756	40,793	3,400
5	25,790	33,527	2,794	38,685	3,224	47,712	3,976
6	29,530	38,389	3,200	44,295	3,691	54,631	4,553
For each add'l member, add	3,740	4,862	406	5,610	468	6,919	577

Second Harvest Food Bank thanks the following local partners for their commitment to the FSP and looks forward to working together to increase FSP access in North and West Santa Clara County:

Mountain View Community Services, Rahima Foundation, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, Sunnyvale Community Services, Sunnyvale Salvation Army, West Valley Community Services

⁵ Food Stamp Program (SNAP) income guidelines are effective through September 30, 2010



Food Stamp Barriers

Central and South San Mateo County



INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).¹ Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **the FSP combats hunger using federally-funded benefits to help low-income Californians buy nutritious food.** Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. The FSP is a life-saving component of San Mateo County's social safety net. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. **In San Mateo County, FSP participants increased by 45%, meaning that almost 15,000 people in the county now receive food assistance through the FSP.**²

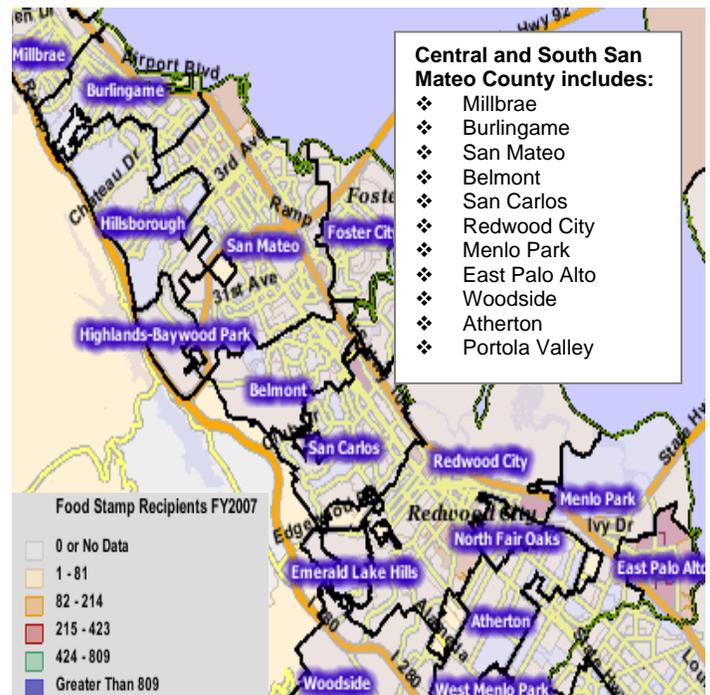
Yet many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. California Food Policy Advocates estimates that **only 18% of income-eligible people in San Mateo County receive Food Stamps, leading to a loss of nearly \$100 million in potential local economic activity** spurred by federal dollars.³

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has been helping eligible households apply for the FSP since February 2008. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by SHFB food recipients, SHFB has developed recommendations to increase FSP participation. This issue brief will focus on Central and South San Mateo County, detailing some of the specific barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. It will suggest some policy and programmatic changes to help low-income San Mateo County households access needed support, and provide economic benefit for the *entire* community.

CENTRAL AND SOUTH SAN MATEO COUNTY

The majority of San Mateo County residents live in the central and southern region of the county. Though each community is distinct, the region includes both high- and middle- to low-income areas. The mid-Peninsula houses many commuters to San Francisco or San Jose, but many of its communities also have their own central business districts and employment-generating industries. According to census data, about **9% of Central and South San Mateo County residents live at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)** – the income guideline for most FSP households. **Of these, less than 29% are actually receiving Food Stamps.**⁴

Food Stamp Recipients in Central and South San Mateo County (2007)



Source: Network for a Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

² California Budget Project. <http://www.cbp.org>

³ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

⁴ Based on analysis of census data using Network for Healthy California GIS Map (<http://cnnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

BARRIERS

1. Immigration Fears: Though undocumented immigrants are not eligible for the FSP, any member of the household who is a U.S. Citizen can apply. Many of the FSP-eligible households in San Mateo County are from mixed-status families. Some are worried that applying will impact other family members; others have heard myths that their children will have to pay the benefits back, or will be taken to the army when they reach 18. The myth that receiving Food Stamps makes one a “public charge” and will impact immigration status persists even among legal immigrants, perhaps because the same Human Services Agency (HSA) intake workers process both FSP and CalWorks (cash aid/welfare). **Cash aid may impact a recipient’s future attempts to become a citizen, but Food Stamps will not.**

2. Low Literacy: Food Stamp Outreach has generally been done through flyers, posters, and written information. While this method works for some, many FSP-eligible people in San Mateo County suffer from low literacy. Even if these individuals do find out about the FSP, filling out an application on their own may be an insurmountable barrier.

The director of an East Palo Alto service agency has seen improvements since “stamps” were replaced with EBT cards: *“I see a lot of positive comments about Food Stamps. There is less stigma now - the plastic cards were a blessing, a real step.”* Still, many struggling families don’t want a “hand-out.”

3. Stigma: Living among wealthy neighbors can make asking for financial assistance very embarrassing. The recent recession has led many previously-stable families to seek out food assistance, but many don’t want their neighbors to know they need help. Some households would rather quietly go to a food pantry than use a special card at the supermarket, where everyone can see. **The finger-imaging requirement only adds to the shame many feel when asking for help by making FSP applicants feel like criminals.**

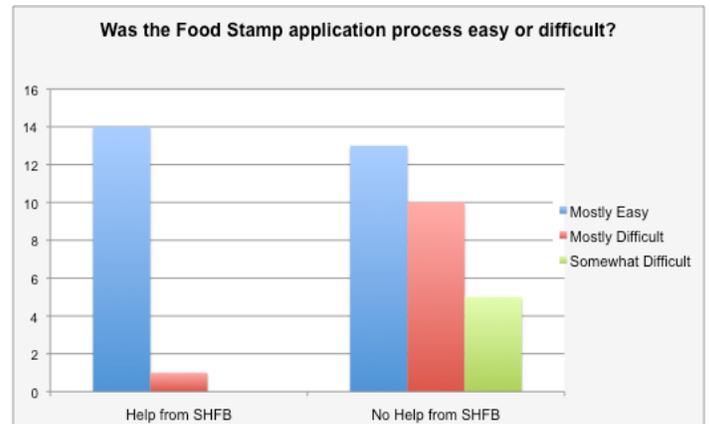
4. Verification Documents and Quarterly Reporting: The complicated process of providing verification documents for identity, income, rent, child care, and other bills is the most significant barrier to completing the FSP application process. It takes many households weeks to pull together the necessary documentation, and others simply become discouraged and give up.

Though counties are expected to assist applicants in obtaining the correct documentation, HSA eligibility workers are swamped with new applicants; they often cannot take time to help households with this requirement. Additionally, many households don’t know that some verification documents can be replaced by an affidavit or other method; if they can’t obtain these documents, they may unnecessarily withdraw their application.

“The Food Stamp application form was easy, but getting all my documents together took months because of my disability. They ask for so much!”

- San Carlos resident and FSP recipient

5. Work Requirement: Though it is not a state requirement, San Mateo County makes it mandatory for *non-working* adults to participate in the Food Stamp Employment and Training program (FSET) in order to receive Food Stamps. The requirement to attend the training in San Carlos without pay not only poses transportation problems for many FSP recipients, but also further stigmatizes the receipt of Food Stamps. The requirement seems to assume that all FSP applicants are trying to “free-load” and their search for employment must be monitored. **For those adults who have worked much of their lives, but have been hit hard by the current recession, the work requirement is humiliating and discouraging.**



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 4 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in Central and South San Mateo County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.)
- Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP.

State

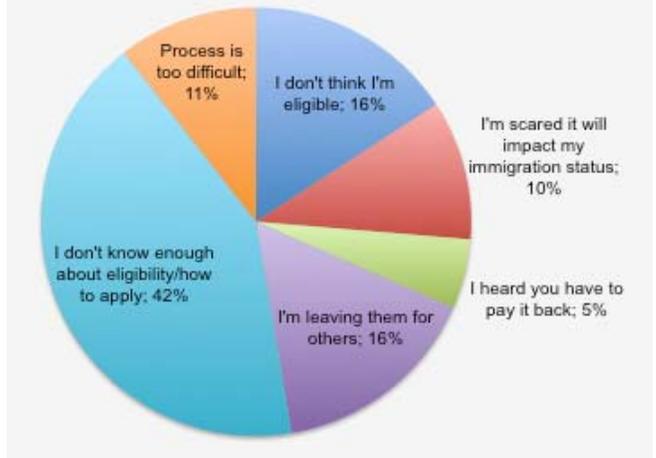
- Eliminate the finger-imaging requirement
- Create a plan to move to simplified reporting (bi-annual), and reduce need for verification documents as part of reporting requirements.

San Mateo County (Human Services Agency)

- Increase funding for hiring of eligibility workers to streamline process in all county HSA offices
- Opt-in to the state-wide waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households, without need to document hardship (as per CDSS All County Letter 09-62)
- Move to online application
- Eliminate Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) mandatory work requirement; institute voluntary FSET instead.
- Extend open office hours at HSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full time
- Provide training to all county workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns
- Conduct sensitivity training (ie. “poverty simulation”) for county workers
- Increase Food Stamp 101 and 102 trainings for community-based organizations (CBOs)

- Expand list of contracted community-based organizations (CBOs) with incentive reimbursement for approved applications
- Pilot funding for one full-time eligibility worker placed in each Core Agency dedicated to FSP application assistance

Why Haven't You Applied for Food Stamps?



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 4 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in Central and South San Mateo County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Local Partners

- Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can attend county training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance
- All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB
- SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by county and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods
- SHFB can develop outreach through radio, TV, and other non-print media
- SHFB and local groups can coordinate FSP outreach with WIC offices
- School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants
- Superintendent of Schools can open up classroom space for use for outreach
- Migrant Education Program and Community Schools can publicize and pre-screen for FSP
- Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP
- Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge”

Eligibility for federal nutrition programs is generally based on household income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For some programs, applicants have to prove their eligibility with verification documents. Refer to the charts below that outline the income eligibility and verification documents required for each of four programs. The FSP is the most restrictive for income and number of documents required of applicant households.

Income Eligibility and Verification Documentation Required for Four Federal Nutrition Programs:

Programs	Food Stamp Program (SNAP)	USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program	National School Lunch Program	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Income Eligibility	< 130% FPL (gross income limit) < 100% FPL (net income limit)	< 150% FPL	< 185% FPL (reduced lunch) < 130% FPL (free lunch)	< 185% FPL
Verification Documents Required to Prove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income ▪ Social Security Number ▪ Naturalization papers (if applicable) ▪ Utility Bills ▪ Medical Expenses ▪ Child Care or Adult Care expenses (if applicable) ▪ Disability (if applicable) ▪ Child Support Payments (if applicable) ▪ Bank Statements (may be requested by county) ▪ Shelter Costs (may be requested by county) ▪ Household size (may be requested by county) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income 	None. Only a signature is required in most cases (except for 3% of families who are selected as a random sample in each school district and must provide proof of income)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income

Dollar Amounts Corresponding to Income Eligibility (effective through June 30, 2010)⁵

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	100% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL	FOOD STAMPS, FREE SCHOOL MEALS (130% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		USDA EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (150% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC), REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS (185% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)	
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4	22,050	28,665	2,389	33,075	2,756	40,793	3,400
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For each add'l member, add	3,740	4,862	406	5,610	468	6,919	577

Second Harvest Food Bank thanks the following local partners for their commitment to the FSP and looks forward to working together to increase FSP access in Central and South San Mateo County:

Ecumenical Hunger Program, El Concilio, Fair Oaks Community Center, Institute for Human and Social Development (HeadStart), Redwood City Salvation Army, Redwood City School District, Samaritan House, San Mateo County Human Services Agency, Shelter Network, San Mateo Labor Council AFL-CIO, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – San Mateo County

⁵ Food Stamp Program (SNAP) income guidelines are effective through September 30, 2010



Food Stamp Barriers

Coastside San Mateo County



INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).¹ Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **the FSP combats hunger using federally-funded benefits to help low-income Californians buy nutritious food.** Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. The FSP is a life-saving component of San Mateo County's social safety net. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. **In San Mateo County, FSP participants increased by 45%, meaning that almost 15,000 people in the county now receive food assistance through the FSP.**²

Yet many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. California Food Policy Advocates estimates that **only 18% of income-eligible people in San Mateo County receive Food Stamps, leading to a loss of nearly \$100 million in potential local economic activity** spurred by federal dollars.³

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has been helping eligible households apply for the FSP since February 2008. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by SHFB food recipients, SHFB has developed recommendations to increase FSP participation. This issue brief will zero-in on the Coastside of San Mateo County, detailing some of the specific barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. It will suggest some policy and programmatic changes to help low-income Coastside households access needed support, and provide economic benefit for the entire community.

COASTSIDE SAN MATEO COUNTY

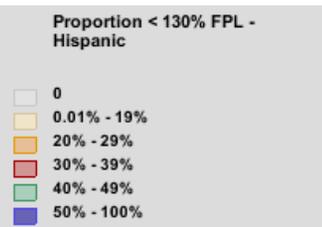
Considered a vacation spot by many Bay Area residents, the Coastside region is home to a number of vibrant and distinct permanent communities. Farmers and fishermen live among Silicon Valley executives, naturalists, and retirees. A large community of farmworkers, many of whom are Latino, live and work on the Coastside. According to census data, about **8% of Coastside residents live at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)** – the income guideline for most FSP households. **Of these, only 10% are actually receiving Food Stamps.**⁴ The Latino community on the Coastside disproportionately experiences poverty and hunger – in some areas of the Coastside, more than 30% of Latinos live at or below 130% FPL.

Percentage of Hispanic Residents below 130% FPL



Coastside includes the communities:

- ❖ Half Moon Bay
- ❖ Pescadero
- ❖ La Honda
- ❖ El Granada
- ❖ Montara
- ❖ Moss Beach
- ❖ Miramar



Source: Network for a Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbp.org>

² California Budget Project. <http://www.cbp.org>

³ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

⁴ Based on analysis of census data using Network for Healthy California GIS Map (<http://cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

BARRIERS

1. Isolation: The Coastside's geographic isolation from the rest of the county makes it difficult to access many services. Though the Human Services Agency (HSA) has out-posted eligibility workers in Pescadero and Half Moon Bay, **there has been no finger-imaging device available on the Coastside, so Half Moon Bay applicants have had to complete this requirement in San Carlos.** Thanks to a recent HSA decision, these applicants will now be able to postpone finger-imaging for a year. Still, Half Moon Bay residents are not extended automatic waivers of the face-to-face interview, and some do not know they can request one. Buses to reach the main HSA offices are indirect and infrequent; **a one-way bus trip from Pescadero to Redwood City goes only once a day and takes at least 3.5 hours.** Additionally, the rotating schedule of the out-posted eligibility workers has hindered a more comprehensive effort at outreach and awareness-raising. Residents of the Coastside do not perceive a consistent face of HSA or the FSP they can trust.

"I've heard Food Stamps will affect you if you want to become a citizen. I've also heard that you have to pay it back or your kids will be sent to the military."
-Pescadero resident, explaining why she doesn't want to apply

2. Immigration Fears: Many families in need on the Coastside are Spanish-speaking mixed-immigration status households. The myth that receiving Food Stamps makes one a "public charge" and will impact immigration status persists even among legal immigrants, as do other insidious rumors.

3. Lack of EBT vendors in Pescadero: The two grocery stores on Main Street in Pescadero do not accept Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Pescadero residents who receive Food Stamps must travel 18 miles to Half Moon Bay or 35 miles to Santa Cruz to use their benefits.

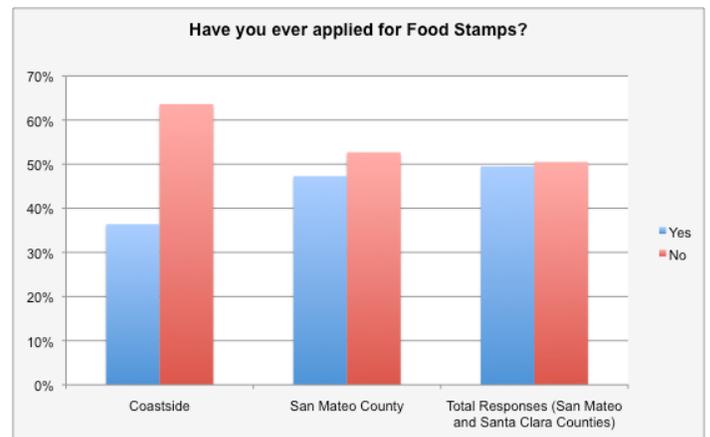
4. Stigmatization by store clerks: Some town residents reported seeing clerks at a Half Moon Bay grocery store **ridiculing customers using EBT cards.**

5. Verification Documents and Quarterly Reporting:

The complicated process of providing verification documents negatively impacts Coastside households because of the difficulty of getting to the HSA offices. One trip over the hill is hard; making multiple trips to submit additional documentation (or verifications of changes on Quarterly Reports) is often impossible. Additionally, some Coastside residents live in RVs and use borrowed electricity generators; their bills are not easily verified. Many households don't know that some verification documents can be replaced by an affidavit or other method; if they can't obtain these documents, they may unnecessarily withdraw their application.

"It is hard for [Coastside residents] to get together IDs, Social Security Numbers, utility bills because they often don't have them. I had to hold onto cases waiting for verification longer than any other worker."

- A former out-posted eligibility worker in Pescadero



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Completed at 21 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, including 3 in San Mateo County Coastside.

"I've seen the clerk stop the line to make a big deal when people use Food Stamps and then everyone knows [that they're using EBT]. People are completely humiliated."

-Half Moon Bay resident

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.)
- Simplify EBT vendor application process
- Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP.

State

- Eliminate the finger-imaging requirement
- Create a plan to move to simplified reporting (bi-annual), and reduce need for verification documents as part of reporting requirements.

San Mateo County (Human Services Agency)

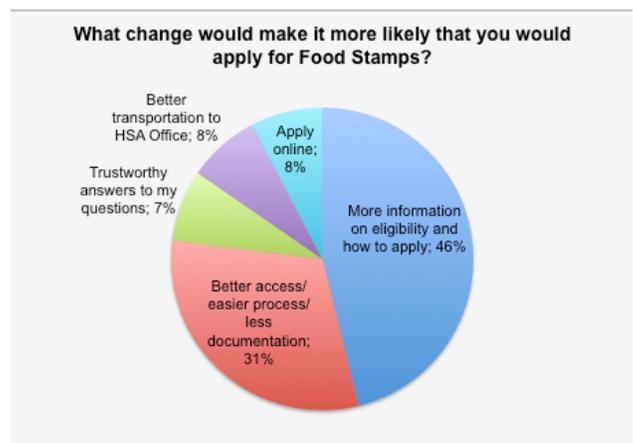
- Provide funding for full-time consistent out-posted eligibility workers to meet need in both Half Moon Bay and Pescadero and publicize their presence in community
- Obtain finger-imaging device for Coastside, to be used by out-posted eligibility workers (at re-certification)
- Extend open office hours at HSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full time
- Opt-in to the state-wide waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households, without need to document hardship (as per CDSS All County Letter 09-62)
- Move to online application
- Eliminate Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) mandatory work requirement; institute voluntary FSET instead.
- Provide training to out-posted eligibility workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns
- Expand list of contracted community-based organizations (CBOs) with incentive reimbursement for approved applications

Local Partners

- Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can attend county training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance
- All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP

promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB

- SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by county and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods
- SHFB, in collaboration with county HSA and local partners, can organize pilot FSP “sign-up event,” where potential applicants are pre-screened, bring all their documents, have their questions answered, and then apply with eligibility workers on the spot
- SHFB and local groups can coordinate FSP outreach with out-posted Coastside WIC worker
- School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants
- Superintendent of Schools can open up classroom space for use for outreach
- Migrant Education Program and Community Schools can publicize and pre-screen for FSP
- Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP
- Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge”
- Local residents can encourage local stores to accept EBT
- Local residents can hold stores accountable for their equal treatment of EBT users
- SHFB and local partners can provide grants and assistance for Coastside Farmers’ Markets, in collaboration with Pie Ranch, to become EBT capable



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 3 SHFB Distribution Sites in Coastside San Mateo County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.

Eligibility for federal nutrition programs is generally based on household income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For some programs, applicants have to prove their eligibility with verification documents. Refer to the charts below that outline the income eligibility and verification documents required for each of four programs. The FSP is the most restrictive for income and number of documents required of applicant households.

Income Eligibility and Verification Documentation Required for Four Federal Nutrition Programs:

Programs	Food Stamp Program (SNAP)	USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program	National School Lunch Program	Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Income Eligibility	< 130% FPL (gross income limit) < 100% FPL (net income limit)	< 150% FPL	< 185% FPL (reduced lunch) < 130% FPL (free lunch)	< 185% FPL
Verification Documents Required to Prove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income ▪ Social Security Number ▪ Naturalization papers (if applicable) ▪ Utility Bills ▪ Medical Expenses ▪ Child Care or Adult Care expenses (if applicable) ▪ Disability (if applicable) ▪ Child Support Payments (if applicable) ▪ Bank Statements (may be requested by county) ▪ Shelter Costs (may be requested by county) ▪ Household size (may be requested by county) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income 	None. Only a signature is required in most cases (except for 3% of families who are selected as a random sample in each school district and must provide proof of income)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identity ▪ Residence ▪ Income

Dollar Amounts Corresponding to Income Eligibility (effective through June 30, 2010)⁵

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	100% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL	FOOD STAMPS, FREE SCHOOL MEALS (130% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		USDA EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (150% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)		WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC), REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS (185% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL)	
	ANNUAL	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	MONTHLY
1	10,830	14,079	1,174	16,245	1,354	20,036	1,670
2	14,570	18,941	1,579	21,855	1,821	26,955	2,247
3	18,310	23,803	1,984	27,465	2,289	33,874	2,823
4	22,050	28,665	2,389	33,075	2,756	40,793	3,400
5	25,790	33,527	2,794	38,685	3,224	47,712	3,976
6	29,530	38,389	3,200	44,295	3,691	54,631	4,553
For each add'l member, add	3,740	4,862	406	5,610	468	6,919	577

Second Harvest Food Bank thanks the following local partners for their commitment to the FSP and looks forward to working together to increase FSP access on the Coastsides:

Cabrillo Unified School District, Coastsides Farmers Market, Coastsides Hope (Food Stamp Outreach Sub-contractor), Mid-Peninsula Housing – Moonridge Apartments and Main Street Apartments, Pie Ranch, Pillar Ridge Community, Puente de la Costa Sur, San Mateo County Human Services Agency, St. Vincent de Paul - Our Lady of the Pillar, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – San Mateo County

⁵ Food Stamp Program (SNAP) income guidelines are effective through September 30, 2010



Food Stamp Barriers

North San Mateo County



INTRODUCTION

In September 2009, 2.9 million Californians paid part of their grocery bill using benefits from the Food Stamp Program (FSP).¹ Known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **the FSP combats hunger using federally-funded benefits to help low-income Californians buy nutritious food.** Each month, FSP participants use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card (similar to a debit card) to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. The FSP is a life-saving component of San Mateo County's social safety net. Between September 2008 and September 2009, as the recession led to skyrocketing unemployment, the number of participants in the FSP in California increased by 25%. **In San Mateo County, FSP participants increased by 45%, meaning that almost 15,000 people in the county now receive food assistance through the FSP.**²

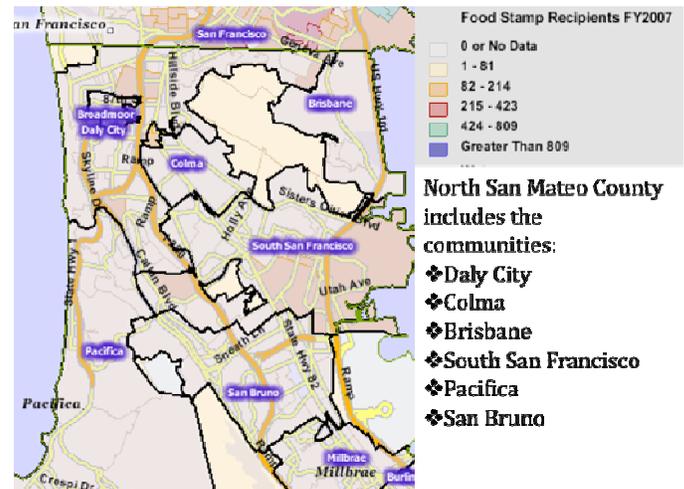
Yet many low-income households have not yet gained access to this vital program. California Food Policy Advocates estimates that **only 18% of income-eligible people in San Mateo County receive Food Stamps, leading to a loss of nearly \$100 million in potential local economic activity** spurred by federal dollars.³

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has been helping eligible households apply for the FSP since February 2008. Drawing on dozens of interviews with local service providers and almost 400 surveys completed by SHFB food recipients, SHFB has developed recommendations to increase FSP participation. This issue brief will zero-in on North San Mateo County, detailing some of the specific barriers that continue to discourage eligible households from applying for the FSP. It will suggest some policy and programmatic changes to help low-income North County households access needed support, and provide economic benefit for the entire community.

NORTH SAN MATEO COUNTY

North San Mateo County includes the suburbs immediately south of San Francisco. Though part of the peninsula, these communities are somewhat isolated by geographic features, including the San Francisco Bay, the Pacific Coast, San Bruno Mountain, and San Andreas Lake. These communities are mainly middle-class and working-class, although both high- and low-income residents live throughout. According to census data, **about 8% of North San Mateo County residents live at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) – the income guideline for most FSP households. Of these, less than 24% are actually receiving Food Stamps.**⁴

Food Stamp Recipients in North San Mateo County (2007)



Source: Network for a Healthy California GIS Map (<http://www.cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

¹ California Budget Project, *Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California*. December 2009. <http://www.cbpp.org>

² California Budget Project. <http://www.cbpp.org>

³ California Food Policy Advocates, *Lost Dollars: Empty Plates*. November 2009. <http://www.cfpa.net>

⁴ Based on analysis of census data using Network for Healthy California GIS Map (<http://cnngis.org>), California Department of Public Health

BARRIERS

1. Language: North County is home to immigrant communities not represented elsewhere in the county, such as Chinese, Filipino, and Middle-Eastern immigrants. Outreach materials often don't exist in their native languages, and many members of these communities do not speak English. Some don't know that they can request translators for their Food Stamp appointment, and so are hesitant to apply. Others receive their quarterly report in a language they don't understand and don't know how to fill it out. If they can't get help, their case may be terminated.

"I had one client who spoke Chinese, and there was no one at the office who could communicate with her. The forms were in English and she couldn't understand them. It was so cumbersome!"

- Public Health Nurse in Daly City

2. Stigmatization by store clerks: One caseworker reported "many complaints" that store clerks at one grocery store in Pacifica ridicule customers who use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. Unfortunately, this supermarket is the only one in the central section of Pacifica that accepts EBT. Additionally, the recession has put many contractors out of work, which has hit Pacifica hard, and so many FSP-eligible households are asking for help for the first time. **When store clerks stop the line and draw attention to EBT-users, those who need help and may have thought about applying for the FSP are convinced otherwise.**

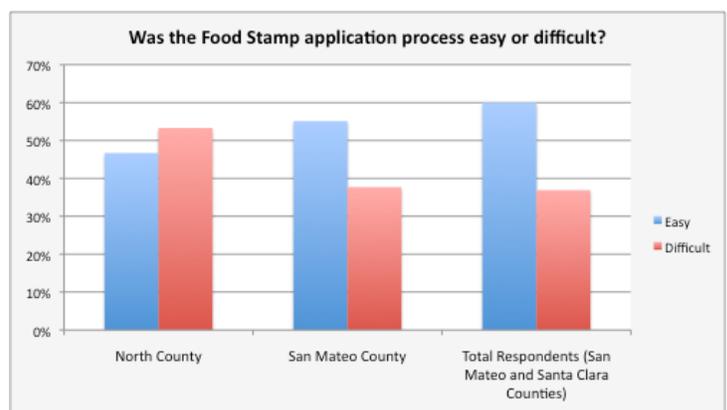
"Many people say this is their first time asking for assistance and they have pride. It's hard for them."
- Church-based volunteer in Colma/Daly City

3. Verification Documents and Quarterly Reporting: The complicated process of providing verification documents for identity, income, rent, child care, and other bills is a significant barrier to completing the FSP application process. It takes many households weeks to pull together the necessary documentation, and others simply become discouraged and give up. Though counties are expected to assist applicants in obtaining the correct documentation, HSA eligibility workers are swamped with new applicants - they often cannot take

time to help households find all verifications. Additionally, many households don't know that some verification documents can be replaced by an affidavit or other method; if they can't obtain these documents, they may unnecessarily withdraw their application.

4. County HSA Funding: Many FSP recipients are satisfied with their interactions at the HSA office and thankful to receive needed assistance. However, because the Daly City HSA office has seen a huge increase in FSP applications in the past year, eligibility workers are overburdened with cases. The wait time for application processing at the Daly City office often exceeds the 30-day federal limit, and **some applicants and partner agencies have reported average waits of 45 to 60 days for a decision from this office.**

5. Sponsorship Requirements: Many of the legal immigrants in North San Mateo County are confused by the complicated rules around the FSP and immigrant sponsorship. "Deeming" of a sponsor's income can make some legal immigrant applicants ineligible for the FSP. Other applicants are worried that their sponsor will be reported if they apply for the FSP. But many don't know that they can opt-out of the application and apply for non-sponsored household members with no repercussions to the sponsor. The rules around sponsorship are so complicated and misunderstood that many eligible legal residents simply do not apply.



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

*Data from 4 SHFB Food Distribution Sites in North San Mateo County. The Food Stamp Survey was conducted at 21 SHFB distribution sites overall in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork by eliminating requirements for verification of all deductions (utilities, medical costs, child care costs, etc.)
- Reduce barriers for two-way direct certification between Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and FSP.

State

- Eliminate the finger-imaging requirement
- Create a plan to move to simplified reporting (bi-annual), and reduce need for verification documents as part of bi-annual report.

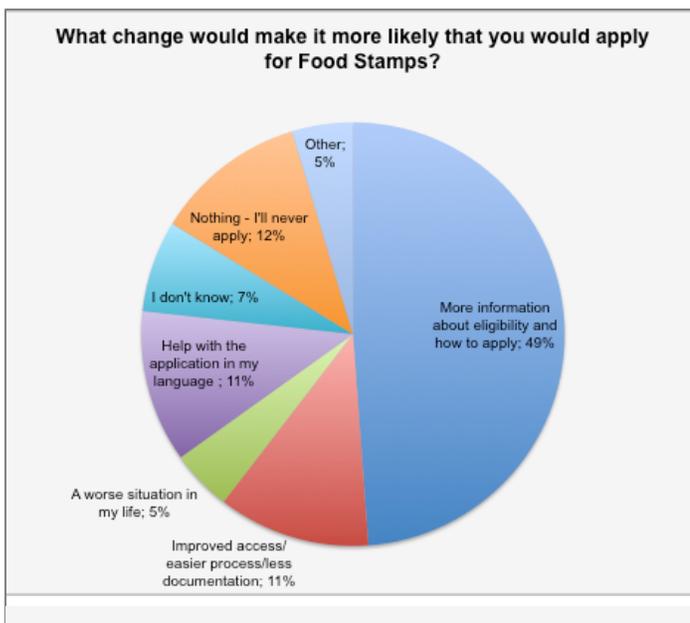
San Mateo County (Human Services Agency)

- Increase funding for hiring of eligibility workers to streamline process in all county HSA offices
- Expand language capabilities at North County HSA office for Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Farsi, and Arabic and develop outreach materials in these languages
- Enact waiver of face-to-face interview for all FSP applicant households, without need to document hardship (as per All County Letter 09-62)
- Move to online application
- Eliminate Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) mandatory work requirement; institute voluntary FSET instead.
- Extend office hours at HSA offices to include nights and/or weekends for applicants who work full-time

- Provide training to all county workers on “Public Charge” and immigrants’ concerns
- Sensitivity training (i.e. “poverty simulation”) for county workers
- Increase Food Stamp 101 and 102 trainings for community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Expand list of contracted community-based organizations (CBOs) with incentive reimbursement for approved applications
- Pilot funding for one full-time eligibility worker placed in each Core Agency dedicated to FSP application assistance

Local Partners

- Religious clergy and volunteers, health care professionals, and social service providers can attend county training to begin FSP pre-screening and application assistance
- All Food Providers and Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) Agency Partners should distribute FSP promotional materials and can hold FSP outreach events in conjunction with SHFB
- SHFB can obtain funding to pilot a full-time “Food Stamp Trainer,” trained in FSP regulations by county and tasked with training partners in pre-screening methods
- SHFB can coordinate outreach with WIC offices
- SHFB can develop outreach through radio, TV, and other non-print media
- School districts can put information about FSP in their materials (acceptance letters, menus) sent to Free and Reduced Lunch participants
- Superintendent of Schools can open up classroom space for use for outreach
- Migrant Education Program and Community Schools can publicize and pre-screen for FSP
- Local churches and places of worship can make regular announcements with information about how to apply for FSP
- Immigration advocates and immigration-law experts can participate in FSP outreach events to bust the myths about “public charge” and answer questions about sponsorship issues



Source: Second Harvest Food Bank Food Stamp Survey (November-December 2009)

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Dollar Amounts Corresponding to Income Eligibility (effective through June 30, 2010)⁵

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For each add'l member, add	3,740	4,862	406	5,610	468	6,919	577

Second Harvest Food Bank thanks the following local partners for their commitment to the FSP and looks forward to working together to increase FSP access in North County:

Daly City Community Center (Food Stamp Outreach sub-contractor), Institute for Human and Social Development (HeadStart), Lincoln Community Center, Pacifica Resource Center, San Mateo County Human Services Agency, Society of St. Vincent de Paul of San Mateo County

⁵ Food Stamp Program (SNAP) income guidelines are effective through September 30, 2010