

The Use of Microsimulation in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Policy Analysis

Client: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service

Project Overview

The purpose of this study is to provide the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) with microsimulation and related analysis to estimate the impact of proposed changes to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) policy, update and improve microsimulation models and their databases, and conduct research to inform FNS policy decisions affecting SNAP.



SNAP is the cornerstone of the nutrition safety net for low-income Americans and has been the largest federal nutrition assistance program for decades. Given the size and breadth of SNAP, it is critically important to be able to accurately and quickly predict the impact of potential changes in SNAP policy. FNS relies on microsimulation models and their databases to provide these predictions.

For this study, Insight is partnering with Mathematica Policy Research to achieve the following four goals:

1. Provide quick-response reform simulations, tabulations, and other analyses. Microsimulation modeling—as well as tabulations and other analyses—are used to estimate the effects of changes in SNAP policies on program eligibility, participation, and benefit amounts to support FNS policy decisions. Insight is providing subject matter expertise in drafting specifications for the analyses and is reviewing and analyzing model and tabular output. Insight will produce a memorandum describing the results of the quick-response analyses.
2. Produce annual reports on SNAP household characteristics. These reports inform researchers and policymakers about the SNAP population, including its demographic characteristics and economic circumstances. Insight is helping Mathematica to update report tables and draft the reports.
3. Prepare edited SNAP Quality Control (QC) system data files. SNAP QC data files are used in microsimulation models to examine and produce the annual reports on SNAP household characteristics. Insight is collecting information on SNAP rules, updating file development parameter files, assessing data quality, and preparing documentation.
4. Estimate national SNAP participation rates using SNAP QC and Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data. FNS uses SNAP participation rates to assess program performance and focus improvement efforts. Insight is collecting parameters to update SNAP participation rates, drafting reports on participation rates, and updating report tables.

Core Activities

Database Development; Microsimulation; Report Development and Presentation; Administrative Data Collection and Analysis; Secondary Data Analysis; File Development

Products

- Memorandum summarizing the results of microsimulation and other quick-response analyses (as requested by FNS)
- SNAP QC file technical documentation (expected December 2016)
- Reports on SNAP household characteristics (expected December 2016)
- SNAP participation rate reports (expected June 2017)