

Milestones in Food Stamps

1939-43

Between 1939 and 1943, the first Food Stamp Program operated by permitting people on relief to buy orange stamps equal to their normal food expenditures; for every \$1 worth of orange stamps purchased, 50 cents worth of blue stamps were received. Orange stamps could be used to buy any food; blue stamps could only be used to buy food determined by the Department to be surplus.



1940

1961

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy, having seen the debilitating effects of hunger while campaigning in Appalachia, directed the USDA to start a pilot Food Stamp program. The pilot programs retained the requirement that the food stamps be purchased, but eliminated the concept of special stamps for surplus foods.



1960

1974

The Food Stamp Program began operating nationwide on July 1, 1974. Participation for July 1974 was almost 14 million.



1970

1964-71

In 1964, President Johnson requested Congress to pass legislation making the Food Stamp Program permanent and Congress responded by enacting the Food Stamp Act of 1964.

Between 1965 and 1971, rapid increases in participation occurred, primarily due to geographic expansion. Participation topped 1 million in March 1966, 2 million in October 1967, 3 million in February 1969, 4 million in February 1970, 5 million one month later in March 1970, 6 million two months later in May 1970, and 10 million in February 1971.



Source: USDA Food & Nutrition Service

1977

In 1977, Congress voted to eliminate purchase requirements on food stamps. The change opened the program to the poorest people, those with the greatest need, who had previously only been allowed to purchase food stamps with cash of which many had desperately little of to spend.



1980

1994

In March 1994, participation hit a new high of 28 million.



1990

2002

In May 2002, the Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 was enacted, including reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program. Major changes include restoration of eligibility for qualified immigrants who have been in the United States at least five years and for their children regardless of how long they have been in the country.



2000

2006

November 2005: The number of people receiving food stamps reached 29.6 million, a jump of nearly 4 million in just three months. The dramatic increase occurred in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Wilma. Also in November 2005, Congress rejected the administration's proposal to cut 300,000 people from the Food Stamp Program.



2006

1981-87

In 1981 and 1982, major legislation was enacted cutting back on the Food Stamp Program.

Recognition of the severe domestic hunger problem in the latter half of the 1980s led to incremental improvements in 1985 and 1987, such as elimination of sales tax on food stamp purchases.



1996

In 1996, food stamp use dropped by 38 percent following passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, or "welfare reform." Between 1996 and 1997, the number of children living in extreme poverty increased by 425,000.



2004

In July 2004, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam were operating state-wide, city-wide and territory-wide Electronic Benefits Transfer systems to issue food stamp benefits, permanently replacing the paper coupons for which the Food Stamp Program is named.

