

Nutrition Week



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Food labeling news

Industry groups lose their COOL over labeling issues

USDA issued an interim final rule September 30 for the mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) program for fish and shellfish as required by the 2002 Farm Bill, according to a USDA press release. The 2004 Appropriations Act delayed applying mandatory labeling to beef, pork, lamb, fruits, vegetables, and peanuts until September 30, 2006, to the dismay of some farm and consumer groups.

"We've had a list of 160 groups that support COOL, including consumer and farm groups, and some ranch groups," says Laura Johnston, director of communications at the National Farmers Union (NFU). "We're trying to reverse the two-year delay and get quicker implementation on COOL."

Fish and shellfish must be labeled at retail to indicate their country of origin and method of production—whether they are wild or farm-raised. However, processed food items that contain fish and shellfish don't need to be labeled. USDA now defines a processed food item as something derived from a covered food (e.g., beef, pork, lamb, fruits, vegetables, and peanuts) that has undergone a change (e.g., cooking, curing, smoking) or that has been combined with other covered foods or other substantive food components (e.g., breading, tomato sauce).

The NFU sees COOL as an opportunity for farmers and ranchers to let consumers know where their food comes from. "We commissioned a survey that shows that more than 82% of consumers want COOL and would pay extra for products grown, raised, and processed in the United States," says Johnston.

Some groups opposing COOL have made efforts to make it voluntary. "We strongly oppose mandatory country-of-origin labeling because we believe it is a costly, cumbersome initiative driven by those whose ultimate objective is to block imports. We support a voluntary program in its place," says Janet M. Riley, senior vice president of public affairs for the American Meat Institute (AMI). "It is our hope that lawmakers will recognize the problems associated with COOL and

will support repeal in favor of a voluntary program," she says. "There is absolutely no evidence that consumers want country-of-origin labeling."

Riley cites an International Food Information Council survey in which less than seven-tenths of the people surveyed named country-of-origin information as something they want added to food labels. "This absence of stated demand hardly justifies the multi-billion-dollar mandate that is mandatory country-of-origin labeling," says Riley.

For states with mandatory labeling programs in place, COOL is less of an issue. For example, Florida has mandated such labeling for fruits and vegetables since the 1980s, says Mike Stuart, a spokesperson for the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association. "Consumers in Florida want to know the origin of products," says Stuart. "Every survey that we've done indicates that the vast majority of consumers want to know the origin of food products they buy," says Stuart.

Johnston agrees that consumers deserve COOL information. "U.S. producers want to be able to give them that information and want to stand behind the products they grow. It seems like a win-win situation," says Johnston.

Heinz plays catch up

Is putting Heinz ketchup on a burger akin to supporting John Kerry for president? Republican state Assemblyman Jim Tedisco recently told the crowd at a Republican cookout in Saratoga County, NY, that using Heinz ketchup would benefit Kerry's presidential campaign, according to a September 23 Associated Press story. Kerry, a Democratic senator from Massachusetts, is married to Teresa Heinz Kerry, whose late husband was related to the condiment giant's founder. The Pittsburgh-based H-J Heinz Company responded that ketchup is a nonpartisan condiment enjoyed by "Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike." Still, Tedisco insists he's "a mustard man" until the November 2 election.

Obesity news

FDA revises obesity drug guidance

FDA is revising its obesity drug guidance for the first time in almost a decade after an advisory committee met in mid-September to discuss possible changes to the existing regulations. The pharmaceutical industry is putting a number of new drugs in the pipeline in the hopes that the FDA will speed up the approval process with the new guidelines.

Eric Colman, MD, medical team leader at the FDA Division of Metabolic and Endocrine Drugs, the group that researches and evaluates obesity drugs, says the changes won't be dramatic but admitted that quite a few new drugs are being considered. "Pharmaceutical companies haven't been pushing, but they want to get a drug on market quickly as they can," he says.

The FDA advisory committee that convened in September to discuss potential revisions recommended approving new obesity drugs based on only one year of safety data instead of the two currently required. FDA defines a weight loss drug as effective if a 5% reduction in body weight occurs by the end of a year of testing.

"At this point, we will sit down, go over the advisory meeting transcript, talk internally, and decide where to go from

here," says Colman. "Some people thought getting rid of the second year of open label [knowing you are taking the obesity drug] would be appropriate."

Howard Eisenson, MD, director of the Duke University Diet & Fitness Center in Durham, NC, says obesity drugs are now a hot topic of research. "It certainly seems like there are a lot of drugs in the development pipeline, and there is a lot of focus today on the importance of treating obesity if we are to reduce diabetes and other cardiovascular disease risk factors," says Eisenson.

He says growing concern about the public-health implications of obesity coupled with rapidly expanding understanding of the physiologic signals that play a role in energy balance, including feeding behaviors, activity, and metabolism, "encourages and facilitates more new drug development," says Eisenson.

In the future, Eisenson believes that managing obesity may take a combination of drugs, and patients would most likely need to take those for a long period of time for maximum efficacy. "I have a fair amount of confidence in FDA's new [proposed] drug-approval process," says Eisenson. "I think there will be greater acceptance of using anti-obesity medications on the part of patients and doctors, and I think we will see some significant results." Go to www.fda.gov/cder/guidance/index.htm to see the guidance document.

Child nutrition news

School nurses behind the scenes in school food fray

Although a spate of schools nationwide have begun breakfast programs to feed hungry children, some school nurses report they still deal with hunger complaints.

Erin Stewart, RN, MSN, a nurse at Hartford (VT) Middle School, typically sees 10 sixth- to eighth-graders daily, many of whom have hunger symptoms such as stomachaches and headaches. "Ten [percent] to 20% don't have breakfast," she says. Her school has a breakfast program, but children eligible for the program still come to her hungry, Stewart says, because breakfast is offered before kids get to school and because it's perceived as being for the poor kids. "We had universal breakfast [for every child] last year, but it wasn't financially feasible," says Stewart, who reports that children hoarded breakfast food. "In a perfect world, families would all have breakfast together every morning," says Stewart. "We need to partner with families around issues that affect education like health and nutrition."

Sue Will, RN, MPH, NCSN, has been a school nurse at an alter-

native learning center in St. Paul, MN, for two years and has worked in the St. Paul public schools for 20 years. Although her district has a breakfast program, she still sees hungry children. "Sometimes children didn't want to eat breakfast or there was no food in the [home] the night before, or they were running late and didn't like what the school served," says Will, who saves fruits, milk, and juices not consumed in the cafeteria to give to hungry patients. "We can't fix child hunger with school breakfast, but we should have school breakfast programs," says Will. "Hunger shouldn't be a problem."

Lois Farnham, RN, BS, MS, supervising nurse for the Essex Junction, VT, school district says her district just instituted a breakfast program, and hungry patients are no longer an issue. "It's a good feeling," says Farnham. In the three schools she supervises, she formerly saw 200 children a week who were hungry. "They'd say they hadn't eaten, had a headache, or weren't feeling good," says Farnham, who has been a school nurse for more than a decade. "It is the parents' job to feed them, but all parents don't have the capacity to do that," says Farnham. "I think all schools should offer a breakfast program to all students. Statistics show that kids do better academically when they've been fed."

Go to www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/ to read more about school breakfast.

Egg rule may send producers scrambling

A new proposed rule from FDA and the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service intended to make eggs safer will put new demands on egg producers that may send some scrambling. FDA published the rule September 22 and is seeking feedback until December 21.

The proposed rule aims to reduce the incidence of Salmonella enteritis (SE), which can cause mild to severe gastrointestinal illness, short-term or chronic arthritis, and even death. Most Salmonella comes from an infection in the egg-laying tract of a hen, and humans can contract the illness when they eat improperly cooked SE-contaminated eggs. CDC data show that the incidence of SE—estimated to cause 118,000 illnesses per year—has remained steady over the past several years. FDA and other federal agencies hope to reduce the number of cases of Salmonella by 50% by 2010.

The proposed regulation applies to egg producers with 3,000 or more laying hens and includes new measures to prevent SE infections, such as

- provisions for procurement of chicks and pullets—hens younger than one year.
- a biosecurity program.
- a pest- and rodent-control program.
- cleaning and disinfecting poultry houses that have had an environmental sample or egg test positive for SE.
- refrigerated storage of eggs at the farm.
- producer testing of the environment for SE in poultry houses. If the environmental test is positive, FDA proposes that egg testing for SE be undertaken, and that, if the test is positive, the eggs be diverted from market.
- identification of a person responsible for SE prevention at each farm.

“The implementation of the provisions of this rule would reduce the number of SE-related illnesses by 33,500,” said Acting FDA Commissioner Lester M. Crawford, MD, in the press release announcing the rule. He also noted that the measures build upon the egg safe handling and refrigeration requirements released in 2000.

However, “there may be lots of expense involved” in implementing the rule’s requirements, says Howard Magwire, director of government relations for United Egg Producers (UEP), an alliance of five organizations providing services to the egg industry: UEP, UEA Further Processor Division, UEA Allied Industry Division, UEA Producer/Packer Division, and United States Egg Marketers (USEM). UEP represents 220 producers nationwide.

Implementing the proposed rule will cost an estimated \$82 million annually for more than 4,100 egg-producing farms, according to the press release. Complying with the FDA’s cooling requirements may be the most expensive for farms, says Magwire.

Gene Gregory, senior vice president of UEP, agrees with Magwire. “I’m surprised at the 36-hour refrigeration rule, and details of biosecurity and testing were also more than what we expected,” says Gregory. It may be more difficult for smaller producers to comply, says Gregory. “The rule requires sampling 1,000 eggs. For a small producer, that’s a large percentage of their eggs that they’ll lose money on.”

“The industry supports egg safety,” says Magwire. “We might have issues [with carrying out the rule.]. We will have to look at how it impacts us.” He says UEP is seeking responses from producers on FDA’s proposal. “A lot of producers already are doing some or quite a bit of the things that are required, such as some of the biosecurity and environmental testing,” he says.

Magwire says there are several different kinds of laws in place. One is voluntary programs to address SE in eggs. Also, state agriculture departments typically issue laws on egg quality, outlining what constitutes a Grade A egg. UEP also has a five-star egg safety program that any state can use, Magwire says.

For example, Ohio’s producers participate in one of several voluntary industry egg-safety programs, including the Ohio Egg Quality Assurance Program (OEQAP), the National Poultry Improvement Program, and the UEP Five-Star Program, which set stringent standards for the production, processing and transportation of eggs. The OEQAP, formed in 1996, is a cooperative effort of the Ohio Poultry Association (OPA) and its members with the Ohio Department of Agriculture. “While we have not yet reviewed the FDA proposed changes in detail, we are fully supportive of the concept of enhancing the safety of our country’s food supply,” according to a statement from the OPA, which represents more than 600 of the state’s egg producers.

FDA is also soliciting comment on whether to propose potential retail establishment requirements to address egg safety concerns.

Submit written or electronic comments by December 21 to: Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), Food and Drug Administration, 5630 Fishers lane, Room 1061, Rockville, MD 20852. Include docket numbers 1996P-0418, 1997P-0197, 1998P-0203, and 2000N-0504 and RIN Number 0910-AC14. E-mail comments to fdadockets@oc.fda.gov.

Go to www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2004/NEW01117.html to read the press release.

Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance

Reversing the rapid rise in obesity among American children and youth will require a multipronged approach by schools, families, communities, industry, and government that would be as comprehensive and ambitious as national antismoking efforts, according to a new report from the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. While no single intervention or group acting alone can stop the epidemic of childhood obesity, the steps recommended by the committee that wrote the report all aim to increase and improve opportunities for children to engage in physical activity and eat a healthy diet.

“We must act now and we must do this as a nation,” said Jeffrey Koplan, vice president for academic health affairs at Emory University in Atlanta and former director of the CDC. “Obesity may be a personal issue, but at the same time, families, communities, and corporations all are adversely affected by obesity, and all bear responsibility for changing social norms to better promote healthier lifestyles,” Koplan added.

“We recognize that several of our recommendations challenge entrenched aspects of American life and business, but if we are not willing to make some fundamental shifts in our attitudes and actions, obesity’s toll on our nation’s health and well-being will only worsen,” he said.

Among specific steps recommended by the report is a call for schools to implement nutritional standards for all foods and beverages served on school grounds, including those from vending machines. The committee also recommended that schools expand opportunities for all students to engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day.

The report also calls on the food, beverage, and entertainment industries to voluntarily develop and implement guidelines for advertising and marketing directed at children and youth. Congress should give the Federal Trade Commission the authority to monitor compliance with the guidelines and establish external review boards to prohibit ads that fail to comply. Restaurants should continue to expand their offerings of nutritious foods and beverages, and should provide calorie content and other nutrition information.

Parents must play their part as well by providing healthy foods in the home and encouraging physical activity by limiting their children’s recreational television, video game, and computer time to less than two hours a day, among other means.

Community organizations and state and local governments can make a difference by implementing programs that promote nutrition and regular physical activity and by

supporting the establishment or revision of zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans to include or enhance sidewalks, bike paths, parks, playgrounds, and other recreational facilities.

Schools’ influence on healthy eating, exercise

New policies are urgently needed to ensure that all foods and beverages available at schools are consistent with nutrition guidelines, the report says. There has been a rapid increase in the availability and marketing of foods such as vending-machine sodas and snacks and other high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and beverages that compete with those offered through federal school-meal programs, the report says.

A 2000 report from the Government Accountability Office found that competitive foods were sold in 98% of secondary schools, 74% of middle schools, and 43% of elementary schools.

Although the USDA requires school meals to follow its Dietary Guidelines for Americans, federal restrictions on competitive foods and beverages are limited to prohibiting

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the sale of soft drinks and certain types of candy in cafeterias while meals are being served, although 21 states have imposed further restrictions.

To counter trends of decreasing physical activity among school-age children, schools should provide opportunities for students to engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily, the report says.

Healthy eating and activity at home

Although many societal factors affect children's eating and activity habits, parents can exert a profound influence on their children by promoting healthy foods and an active lifestyle from an early age and serving as role models, the report says. Parents can encourage their children to develop a healthy, varied diet by introducing new foods in a persistent but noncoercive fashion.

Studies show that repeated exposure is most critical during the early years of life and that it can take five to 10 exposures to a new food before a child will accept it. In addition, parents should consider smaller portion sizes, encourage children to stop eating when they feel full, and avoid using food as a reward.

Parents also should stock their homes with healthy products, particularly fruits and vegetables, to encourage their kids to choose them as snacks. Many concerns have been raised about whether increased consumption of sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks and flavored drinks, is linked to the rise of childhood obesity. By the time they are 14 years old, 52% of boys and 32% of girls are drinking three or more eight-ounce servings of soda a day.

The links between sweetened beverage consumption and BMI are not definitive, the report notes. However, the committee recommended that children be encouraged to avoid sodas and other high-calorie, low-nutrient beverages because of concerns about excessive consumption of "empty calories" and displacement of beverages containing fewer calories and more nutrients.

Industry contributions to addressing obesity

The food and beverage industries spend \$10 billion to \$12 billion annually marketing directly to children and youth, the committee found. The average child views more than 40,000 television commercials each year, and more than half of television ads directed at kids promote high-calorie foods and beverages such as candy, snack foods, fast foods, soft drinks, and sweetened breakfast cereals. In addition, the entertainment industry promotes many products that encourage

sedentary behaviors.

HHS should convene a national conference of industry, business, and public health representatives as well as other stakeholders to establish standards for marketing foods, beverages, and sedentary entertainment, and guidelines for evaluating the effectiveness of the standards. The industries would be responsible for implementing the standards and guidelines.

Monitoring mechanisms and advertising codes should be used by the industries and external review groups, such as the Children's Advertising Review Unit of the Better Business Bureau, to enforce the guidelines. Furthermore, Congress should empower the Federal Trade Commission with the regulatory authority to monitor compliance, scrutinize marketing practices, and establish external review boards to investigate complaints and to prohibit ads that may be deceptive or that have "particular appeal" and conflict with principles of healthful eating and physical activity.

Given Americans' increasing reliance on prepared foods and restaurants for meals and snacks, food packages and restaurant menus or displays should enhance the nutrition information they provide, to help consumers make informed choices, the report says. The Nutrition Facts panels on food and beverage packages should prominently state the total calorie content for items typically consumed all at once, to dispel confusion created when a package contains more than one serving.

The FDA should examine ways to give the food and beverage industry greater flexibility in making truthful, non-misleading nutrient or health claims about their products, such as characterizations of products as high or low in certain nutrients. More restaurants should expand their offerings to include healthier meal options and provide nutrition information on menus or at the point of sale.

Involvement of health professionals

Health insurers and health plans should designate childhood obesity prevention as a priority health issue and should include screening and obesity prevention services in routine clinical practice, the report says. While insurers have largely focused on the treatment of obesity, the high cost of this treatment provides insurers with an incentive to prevent the condition.

Editor's note: This brief was excerpted with permission from a summary of the report Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance, Institute of Medicine, September 30, 2004.

"We recognize that several of our recommendations challenge entrenched aspects of American life and business, but if we are not willing to make some fundamental shifts in our attitudes and actions, obesity's toll on our nation's health and well-being will only worsen."

—Jeffrey Koplan

Briefly noted

Pickle boycott ends

Agreements signed September 30 give a union bargaining rights on behalf of foreign workers and end a several-year boycott of the Wayne County, NC-based Mt. Olive Pickle Co., according to a September 16 Associated Press story. It's the first time in the history of North Carolina that a major food distributor recognized the organizing campaign of farm workers, according to the story. The deals end years of conflict over working conditions for 8,500 legal migrant workers brought to the state by the North Carolina Growers Association each year who harvest several crops for a minimum \$8.06 an hour. Mt. Olive said it would pay more for cucumbers and add a bonus payment to farmers if farmers provided workers' compensation insurance to workers, a possible 10% increase over three years. That money will be passed on to the migrant farmers in the form of higher wages, said Mt. Olive President Bill Bryan. Go to www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/apnews/stories/091604/D8550DPO0.shtml to read the story.

Study: Genetics, environment affect youth obesity

The relationship between how much a mother feeds her child and the child's body mass scores depends in part on the child's predisposition to obesity. This suggests that both genes and environment play a role in child obesity, according to an article published in the October *Pediatrics* called "Parental Feeding Attitudes and Styles and Child Body Mass Index: Prospective Analysis of a Gene-Environment Interaction." Among children predisposed to obesity, elevated child weight appears to restrict how mothers feed children, which in turn may cause the child to gain more weight. Researchers suggest that parents be provided with guidelines for overweight prevention that consider a child's predisposition to obesity. Go to <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/114/>

4/e429?etoc to order a copy of the article.

Students promote low-fat foods, increase sales

Increasing the availability of lower-fat foods and involving students in promoting those food items can increase sales on school a la carte and vending lines, according to findings from the University of Minnesota's Trying Alternative Options in Schools (TACOS) study announced in a September 29 School Nutrition Association press release. The study aimed to increase sales and student consumption of lower-fat foods. All lower-fat foods had to contain 5 g or less of fat per serving and have a primary ingredient that is not sugar. The results showed an increase in the sales of lower-fat food from 19.6% to 27.5% during the first year and from 22.1% to 33.6% during the second. Go to www.asfsa.org/newsroom/sfsnews/lowfatpromotion.asp to read the story.

Legislation to roll back food safety, labeling laws

Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Committee approved legislation by a 30-15 vote on September 30 that would nullify all state and local food safety and labeling laws, according to a September 30 Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) press release. The bill, called the National Uniformity in Food Act, championed by Representative Richard M. Burr, R-NC, and the Grocery Manufacturers of America, is opposed by several state attorneys general and consumer groups, including the Association of Food and Drug Officials—the state officials who enforce state food safety laws—and CSPI. "This legislation is an unacceptable sneak attack on state and local governments that seek to protect their citizens from various foodborne hazards," said CSPI staff attorney Benjamin Cohen. The bill would invalidate any state food safety or labeling requirement in cases where the FDA has no requirement, unless the FDA grants a waiver. Next, the legislation will go to the full House for considera-

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tion. CSPI and other groups will continue to oppose it. Go to www.cspinet.org/new/200409302.html to read the press release.

Child nutrition authorization materials on Web

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) posted materials on its Web site to help organizations implement the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, which expands the availability of nutritious meals and snacks to more children in school and childcare programs. The materials include an outreach toolkit to maximize use of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to teens in homeless, runaway, and domestic violence shelters; a brochure on the summer food program; a sample newsletter article for out-of-school-time programs; and fact sheets on California's year-round summer food pilot program, the seamless summer food option, severe-need school breakfast, and school lunch eligibility for migrant, homeless, and runaway children as well as military families. FRAC also summarizes the highlights of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization

Act and includes links to analyses and policy documents. To browse the materials, go to www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/cnreauthor/cnrc.htm.

States, DC receive \$1.7 million for WIC

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman awarded approximately \$1.7 million to seven states and the District of Columbia to help develop, implement, and evaluate new or inventive methods of service delivery to meet the shifting needs of participants in the WIC program, according to a September 28 USDA press release. Full grant funding was awarded to California (\$450,000), Michigan (\$456,288), and Oregon (\$658,154). North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia were each awarded \$15,000 grants for one year to develop their concept papers into full grant proposals on how to improve consumption of fruit and vegetables among WIC participants. Go to www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?contentidonly=true&contentid=2004/09/0419.xml to read the press release.

Nutrition news

Nutritionists: How the 2004 election could affect nutrition issues

As President Bush and Senator John Kerry face off in a series of presidential debates, nutrition experts are voicing concern about how nutrition issues have been handled—and how they should be handled after the election.

Franca Alphin, MPH, RD, LDN, assistant clinical professor and interim director of health promotion at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, NC, thinks the Bush administration could handle nutrition issues better.

“Scientific advisory boards that should be made up of scientists are now stocked with politicians.”

—Franca Alphin, MPH, RD, LDN

“Scientific advisory boards that should be made up of scientists are now stocked with politicians,” Alphin says. “I know that President Bush supported the food manufacturers in saying that he did not feel that it was up to the food manufacturers to address the obesity issue, but rather that was each individual’s responsibility.”

The World Health Organization issued a statement May 22 saying food manufacturers also had a responsibility in providing healthier foods.

Margo Wootan, PhD, director of nutrition policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CPSI) called the Bush

administration’s treatment of hunger issues “all talk and little action.” She believes there are several nutrition tasks that face the next president. “[The president] must deal with childhood obesity and nutrition. There has been lots of planning, meeting, and hand wringing. Now it’s time for action,” Wootan says.

Key actions should include requiring calorie labeling at chain restaurants, removing junk food from schools, sponsoring large-scale media campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity (e.g., the CDC’s VERB program), and reducing the marketing of unhealthy food to children, says Wootan.

According to CDC’s Web site, VERB is a national, multicultural, social marketing campaign that encourages young people between nine and 13 years old to be physically active every day. The campaign combines paid advertising, marketing strategies, and partnership efforts to reach the distinct audiences of children and adults. Go to www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/ to read more about the VERB campaign.

Jim Weil, president of the Food Research and Action Center, sees two major tasks ahead for the next president: first, to raise wages for the bottom third of workers, and second, to improve programming such as the Food Stamp Program (FSP).

“The next president has the ability to feed the hungry,” says Weil, who believes that the FSP and Summer Food Service Program don’t reach enough people.

Newspaper

Understanding the Food Stamp Program participation decisions of TANF leavers

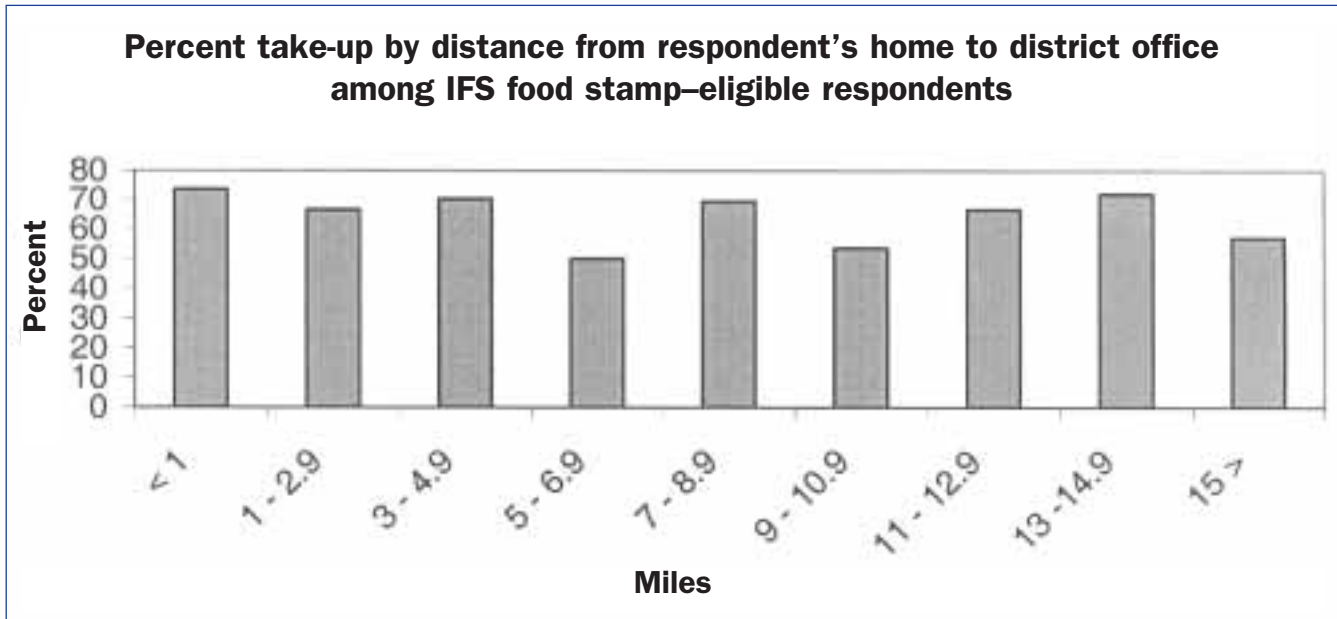
According to a report released September 15 by the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS), the top factors affecting the decision to leave the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to join the Food Stamp Program are neighborhood characteristics and understanding FSP eligibility.

Results indicate that in Chicago, neighborhood characteristics and knowledge of FSP eligibility at the district-office level are important factors in understanding the decision of TANF participants to leave for FSP even after individual or family-level

demographic characteristics are taken into account.

This evidence suggests that the density of the depth of social networks among the FSP-eligible recipients in the district office areas may offset the effects of office outreach and communication strategies. The distance a person must travel from home to the office that administers the FSP also affects the decision to leave TANF for the FSP.

The chart below examines whether the distance the person must travel affects the participation decision.



Source: Understanding the Food Stamp Program Participation Decisions of TANF Leavers, September 15, 2004, E-FAN-04-011, USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan04011/.