

SNEAK PREVIEW: NEW FINDINGS FROM ERS' FOOD & NUTRITION RESEARCH PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service provided a sneak preview of their latest studies on a number of issues facing the nation's domestic food and nutrition assistance programs. The workshop was presented by Margaret Andrews, Assistant Deputy Director for Food Stamp Research for the USDA's Economic Research Service, Craig Gundersen and Laura Tiehen, Economists for the USDA's Economic Research Service, and Linda Kay Benning, Assistant Director for Extension and Outreach for the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.

Craig Gundersen began the presentation by providing statistical information on the food stamp caseload. Mr. Gundersen's presentation focused on the relationship between increases and decreases in food stamp participation and whether or not they are affected more by economic situations or by recent welfare reform legislation. Mr. Gundersen's research has indicated that the economy is the main engine that drives participation in the food stamp program.

Linda Kay Benning outlined several key objectives in ensuring that nutritional standards are being met by recipients of public assistance programs. Some of the objectives include the tracking of system and environmental changes, food resource management, food safety, dietary quality, physical activity, and food security. Ms. Bennings's findings were a collaboration of research conducted by various universities and other qualified professionals, and can be found in the special issue of the Journal of Nutrition Education. For more information on how to obtain a copy of the Journal of Nutrition Education, you may call 1-800-568-7281.

Concluding the presentation was Laura Tiehen. Ms. Tiehen's presentation focused primarily on statistical information relating to various emergency food assistance programs, and the number of meals served daily from each of these programs. Ms. Tiehen's research and reports reflect that approximately 7.2 million meals are served daily from food pantries, and approximately one-half million are served daily from soup kitchens. Approximately two-thirds of the food pantries are religion or faith-based organizations. One interesting fact is that approximately 75% of these pantries do not have a single paid staff member.

Information on the research done by the USDA's Economic Research Service can be found on their website, www.ers.usda.gov.