

# CARSEY INSTITUTE

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

*BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO SUPPORT RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY*

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## **New Report: Food Stamp Program Provides Critical Safety Net to Low-Income Rural Families**

WASHINGTON, D.C., Oct. 19, 2005 – People who live in rural America rely more heavily on the federal Food Stamp Program than do residents of urban areas, according to a new analysis by The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

The Institute's analysis found that while 22 percent of Americans lived in rural areas in 2001, a full 31 percent of the nation's food stamp beneficiaries lived there. In all, 4.6 million rural residents received food stamp benefits in 2001, the analysis found.

"Many of America's rural families struggle to make a living," said Cynthia M. Duncan, the director of The Carsey Institute. "In these rural communities, as in many of our cities and suburbs, food stamps provide crucial supplements to low income families' budgets."

The food stamp analysis, "Rural America Depends on the Food Stamp Program to Make Ends Meet," is the first of a series of policy briefs from [The Carsey Institute](#).

The policy brief provides a demographic picture of rural food stamp recipients, including information on income, race, age and family size. It also compares data for rural and urban recipients.

Among its findings, the Carsey analysis showed:

- In 2001, 7.5 percent of all rural residents received food stamps, compared to 4.8 percent of residents of urban areas.

- While 10.6 million rural residents were living in poverty, only 4.6 million received food stamps in 2001, suggesting that many people who may be eligible for help are not benefiting from the program.
- In 2001, 91 percent of rural elderly in the food stamp program had household incomes less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level.
- A significant share of food stamp beneficiaries are under 18 years of age. Children accounted for 43 percent of the rural population that depend on food stamps, but only one fourth of rural residents.
- Roughly three-in-five rural residents who receive food stamps live in the South.

In the next few weeks, Congress is expected to consider significant cuts in the federal Food Stamp Program. In all, congressional committees are preparing to make \$3 billion in cuts over five years to federal programs that include food stamps, farm subsidies and nutrition assistance.

Major cuts in the food stamp program could lead to smaller benefits or a loss of eligibility for some current recipients. Such cuts are “likely to have significant adverse effects on the lives of poor rural Americans,” the Carsey analysis concludes.

Nationwide, the typical food stamp benefit was \$185 in 2003, and the average household receiving the benefit had a gross monthly income of \$640, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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*The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire is committed to building knowledge to meet the complex challenges confronting rural America. The Institute conducts non-partisan, interdisciplinary research and communicates its findings to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.*