

## DATA SNAPSHOT: GEORGIA SNAP

### Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) offers nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families. SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is a federal aid program that is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) agency. According to the FNS, SNAP benefits cost \$74 billion in 2015 and provided roughly 45.7 million Americans with an average benefit of \$126.83 per person per month in food assistance. Table I summarizes the SNAP participants in Georgia in 2008, 2013 and 2015.

**Table I. SNAP Summary Statistics for Georgia**

	GEORGIA	METRO ATLANTA <sup>1</sup>	NON-METRO ATLANTA
2008	1,069,373	470,288	599,085
2013	1,918,887	916,967	1,001,920
2015	1,787,054	920,057	866,997
% Change 2008-2013	79.4%	95.0%	67.2%
% Change 2013-2015	-6.9%	0.3%	-13.5%
% Change 2008-2015	67.1%	95.6%	44.7%

Source: Georgia Department of Human Services

<sup>1</sup> The counties considered located in the Atlanta metro area are: Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dawson, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Haralson, Heard, Henry, Jasper, Lamar, Meriwether, Morgan, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Pike, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton.

Table I shows that there has been a pronounced increase in the number of SNAP recipients between 2008 and 2013 in Georgia. SNAP participation increased by 79.4 percent within this time period. Fifty-three percent of that change is from the Atlanta metro area alone, where the number of SNAP recipients surged from about 470,000 in 2008 to about 917,000 in 2013, a 95 percent increase. Non-metro Atlanta accounted for the other 47 percent increase in SNAP participation within Georgia, with an increase of 67.2 percent in this time period. Since 2013, the data shows that participation in SNAP has declined a bit. Between 2013 and 2015, SNAP participation fell by nearly 7 percent in Georgia. While metro Atlanta experienced a small increase (0.3 percent), the non-metro area experienced a 13.5 percent decrease. Further declines in program participation are expected as the American economy continues to recover from the Great Recession.

The rapid increase and subsequent recent decline in SNAP participation are reflective of the fact that the program, along with other welfare programs, is an “automatic stabilizer” for the economy. This means that participation tends to be high during economic downturns as an increasing number of families struggle with pay cuts and job losses. As the economy picks up, automatic stabilizers start to shrink in size because businesses begin to hire more and offer pay raises. Although there have been policy changes to the program over the years that expanded eligibility requirements, improved program access, increased benefits for participants, and allowed states more

administrative control over the program (Andrews 2012), a 2012 analysis by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that these changes have only played a minor role in the growth in participation in the program since 2007. The CBO further states that a majority of the growth can be attributed to the Great Recession of 2008-09 and the slow recovery process that followed. Our previous report on SNAP<sup>2</sup> cites research with similar findings.

Table 2 shows the number of able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) on SNAP between the

ages of 18 and 49. In Georgia, the number of recipients in this category grew by 263 percent between 2008 and 2013.<sup>3</sup> Similar surges in participation among ABAWDs can be found in both metro Atlanta and non-metro Atlanta.<sup>4</sup> Although ABAWDs made up about 5 percent of participants in the program in 2008 in Georgia, they represented about 11 percent in 2013 and 9 percent in 2015. Similar proportions over the years can be found when looking at the metro area and non-metro area separately. Since 2013, these areas, and Georgia as a whole, have seen declines in participation among ABAWDs in the program (approximately 19 percent).

**Table 2. ABAWDs on SNAP Summary Statistics for Georgia**

	GEORGIA	METRO ATLANTA	NON-METRO ATLANTA
2008	56,054	25,821	30,233
2013	203,534	97,405	106,129
2015	165,593	79,822	85,771
% Change 2008-2013	263.1%	277.23%	251.04%
% Change 2013-2015	-18.6%	-18.1%	-19.2%
% Change 2008-2015	195.4%	209.1%	183.7%

Source: Georgia Department of Human Services

Below, Map 1 shows the percentage change in SNAP participation in Georgia between 2008 and 2015 by county. In the map, the counties that experienced the smallest change are marked with a light red color while the counties with the largest change are dark red. The River Valley Regional Commission<sup>5</sup> (30 percent) and the Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission<sup>6</sup> (33 percent) were the regional commissions with the smallest increase in SNAP participation while the Atlanta metro area (96 percent) and Georgia Mountains

Regional Commission<sup>7</sup> (78 percent) were the areas with the greatest increase. As shown in Map 1, the top 10 counties that saw the greatest increase in SNAP participation between 2008 and 2015 were: Catoosa, DeKalb, Clarke, Barrow, Cherokee, Lamar, Hall, Gwinnett, Paulding, and Henry counties. These counties combined contributed approximately 44 percent of the increase in SNAP participation that Georgia experienced during this time.

<sup>2</sup> Brett Mullins, Mark Rider, David Sjoquist and Sally Wallace. "Trends in TANF and SNAP Participation in Georgia." Fiscal Research Center, October 2015. Retrieved from [frc.gsu.edu/files/2015/10/SNAP-TANF-Trends-Report\\_October-2015.pdf?wpdmdl=4339](http://frc.gsu.edu/files/2015/10/SNAP-TANF-Trends-Report_October-2015.pdf?wpdmdl=4339).

<sup>3</sup> Six years into the recovery from the Great Recession, high enrollment in 2013 and 2015 (as compared to 2008) may indicate that most participants who enrolled during the recession are still receiving the benefits.

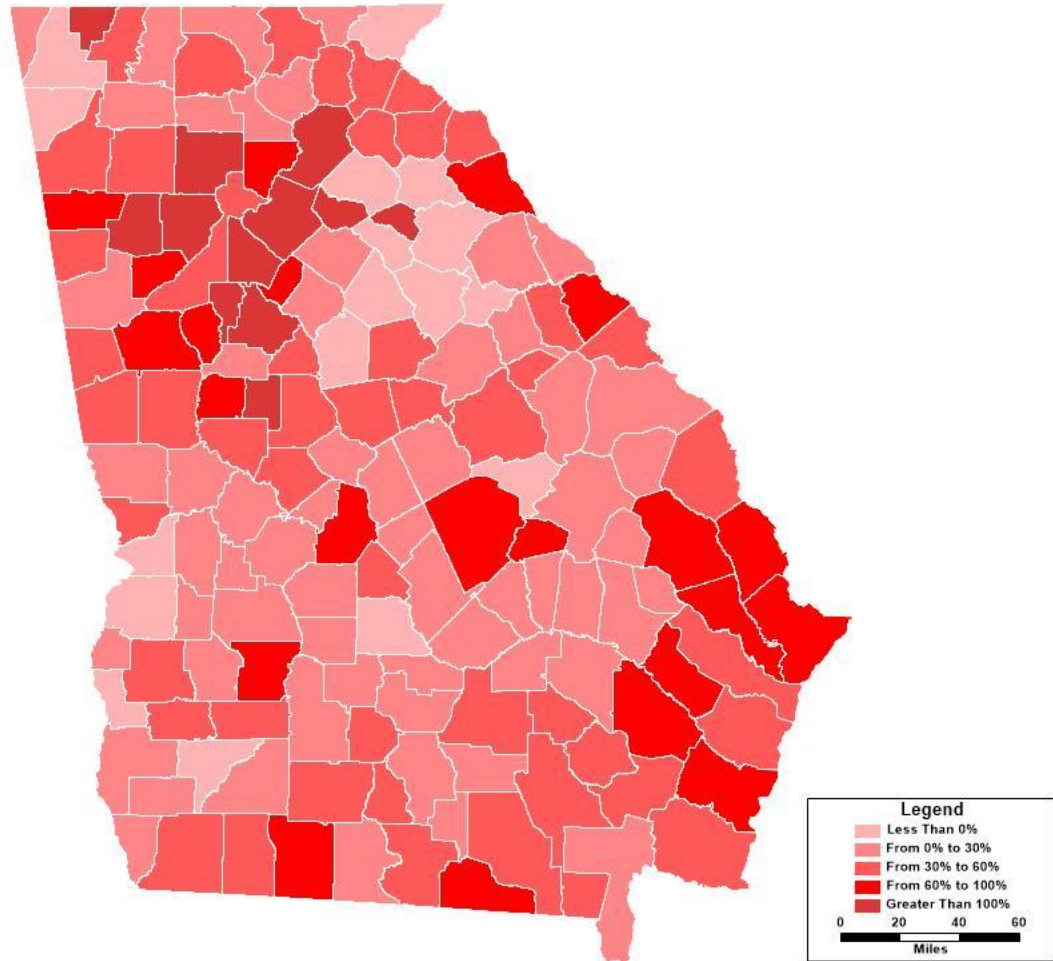
<sup>4</sup> Rural counties are not subject to ABAWD requirements, as unemployment rates are higher than the state average and fewer employment opportunities exist. Declines in SNAP participation in rural counties may be attributable to migration to metro areas or other states.

<sup>5</sup> Regional commissions are overseen by the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions. The River Valley Regional Commission (West Central Georgia) consists of Chattahoochee, Crisp, Dooly, Harris, Macon, Marion, Muscogee, Quitman, Randolph, Schley, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taylor, and Webster counties.

<sup>6</sup> The Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission (East Central Georgia) consists of Burke, Columbia, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lincoln, Macon, Richmond, Screven, Taliaferro, Warren, Washington, and Wilkes counties.

<sup>7</sup> The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (Northeastern Georgia) consists of Banks, Dawson, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White counties.

**Map 1. 2008-15 Percentage Change in SNAP Participation in Georgia by County**



Map 2 shows the percentage of Georgia’s population that was on SNAP in 2015 by county. In the map, the counties with the lowest percentages are colored light red while the counties with the largest percentages are dark red. The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (16 percent) and the Coastal Area Regional Commission (15 percent)<sup>8</sup> were the areas in the state that had the lowest percentage of their population on SNAP in 2015, while the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission<sup>9</sup> (28 percent) and the River Valley

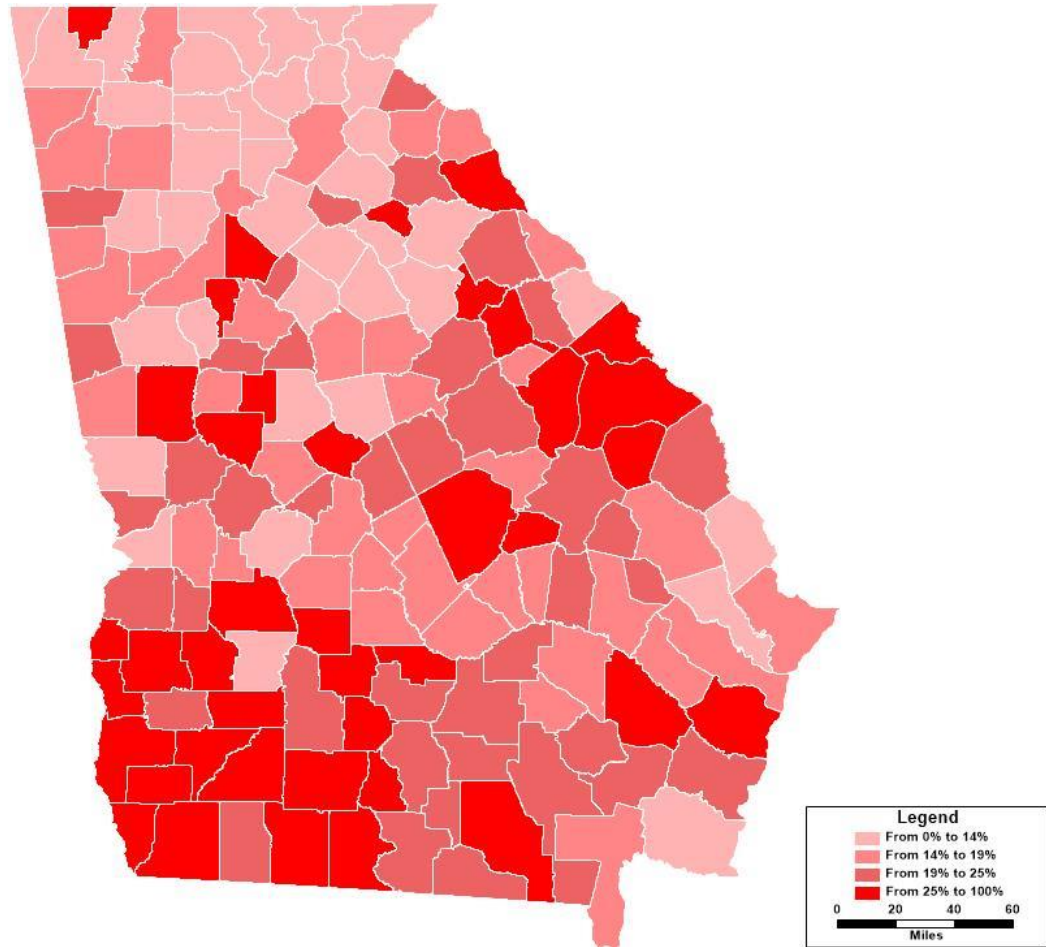
Regional Commission (22 percent) were the regional commissions with the largest percentage of their population on SNAP. This is consistent with the estimate observed in a previous report on SNAP enrollment.<sup>10</sup> As illustrated in Map 2, Georgia’s top 10 counties with the highest SNAP participants to population ratio in 2015 were: Treutlen, Dougherty, Terrell, Catoosa, Wayne, Early, DeKalb, Clay, Laurens, and Clayton counties. Each one of these counties had at least 30 percent of its population on SNAP in 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The Coastal Area Regional Commission (Southeastern Georgia) consists of Bryan, Bulloch, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long, and Madison counties.

<sup>9</sup> The Southwest Regional Commission consists of Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas, and Worth counties.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Bluestone. “Geographic Dispersion of SNAP Enrollment in Georgia.” Fiscal Research Center, February 2014. Retrieved from [cslf.gsu.edu/files/2014/06/geographic\\_dispersion\\_of\\_snap\\_enrollment\\_in\\_georgia\\_1.pdf](http://cslf.gsu.edu/files/2014/06/geographic_dispersion_of_snap_enrollment_in_georgia_1.pdf).

**Map 2. Percentage of Population on SNAP in 2015 in Georgia by County**



## Conclusions

The number of SNAP participants in Georgia and Atlanta have significantly increased since the beginning of the Great Recession. South Georgia and the Atlanta metro area experienced the largest percentage increase in SNAP participation between 2008 and 2015. The southern counties also had the largest percentage of their population on SNAP in 2015. Since 2013, the number of people on SNAP has decreased, most notably in the non-metro Atlanta area. Although the program has seen numerous policy changes over the past decade that have expanded eligibility and access to SNAP for many Americans, a majority of the growth between 2008 and 2013 in Georgia is likely attributable to the Great Recession. As the economy continues to recover, further declines in SNAP participation are expected.

## Additional Sources

- Andrews, Margaret, and David Smallwood. "What's Behind the Rise in SNAP Participation?" *United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service*. United States Department of Agriculture, 1 Mar. 2012. Web. 30 June 2016.
- "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." *Congressional Budget Office*, April 2012. Web. 23 June 2016.
- "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation and Costs-National Level Annual Summary." United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. 8 July 2016. Web. 19 July 2016.

## About the Authors

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