



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food and  
Nutrition  
Service

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SUBJECT: Area Eligibility Using Census Data

TO: Regional Directors  
Special Nutrition Programs  
All Regions

State Directors  
Child Nutrition Programs  
All States

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide new information regarding the availability of census data used to establish area eligibility in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Summer Seamless Option (SSO). This memorandum includes recently clarified flexibility in using census data for area eligibility determinations and therefore supersedes SP 38-2014, CACFP 10-2014, SFSP 15-2014, *Area Eligibility Using Census Data*, April 21, 2014.

The Secretary may use census data in determining area eligibility for the SFSP and CACFP, as authorized by the National School Lunch Act [42 USC 1761(a)(1)(A)(II) and 1766(f)(3)(A)(ii)(I)(aa)]. Under existing CACFP and SFSP regulations, census data may be used to determine area eligibility for CACFP day care homes and certain SFSP and SSO sites. Eligibility is established when census data indicate that at least 50 percent of the children residing in the area are members of households that meet the income standards for free or reduced-price meals [7 CFR 225.6(c)(3)(B) and 226.15(f)]. Previous policy guidance identified the Census Block Groups (CBGs) to be the geographical unit used to assess eligibility for CACFP, SFSP, and SSO when using census data [CACFP 07-2012, SFSP 09-2012, *Eligibility Based on Census Data: 2012 Data Release*, February 13, 2013].

Ocassionally, a potential CACFP day care home or SFSP or SSO site is determined not to be area eligible, but is located immediately adjacent to an eligible area. This proximity suggests that the children residing in the area from which the homes or site would most likely draw participants would have a likelihood of similar census demographics. In recognizing that likelihood and allowing additional flexibility in the use of census data to establish area eligibility, we can ensure area eligibility determinations accurately identify areas in which poor economic conditions exist. Therefore, CACFP day care homes and SFSP and SSO sites may be determined area eligible using either CBG's or Census Tracts. Census Tracts are geographical units that consist of one or more CBGs.

Additionally, based on analysis of the proposed location, with both State agency and Regional Office approval, up to three adjacent CBGs may be averaged, using a weighted average, to determine eligibility. In all CBGs being averaged, at least 40 percent of children must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Census Tracts may not be combined.

Therefore, using these flexibilities, CACFP day care homes and SFSP and SSO sites are considered area eligible if:

- 50 percent or more of the children in a CBG are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals;
- 50 percent or more of the children in a Census Tract are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; or
- The percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals in up to three adjacent CBGs when averaged is 50 percent or more, provided that at least 40 percent of children in each of the combined CBGs are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, as described above.

#### **Data Availability**

Census Tract and CBG data is now available through the FNS Area Eligibility Mapper:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility>

Instructions for determining eligibility using these data are provided in the same folder as the data. The instructions offer two different tools to determine eligibility: the FNS Area Eligibility Mapper and a map developed by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). The FRAC map is constructed from the same data files and also may be used to determine eligibility.

Additionally, State agencies may request the data file for every CBG in their State and State agencies may provide these data to institutions and partners upon request.

State agencies are reminded to distribute this information to Program operators immediately. Program operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agency contact information is available at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>. State agencies should direct questions to the appropriate FNS Regional Office.



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