



Highlights of [GAO-04-916](#), a report to Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Many individuals familiar with the Food Stamp Program view its rules as unnecessarily complex, creating an administrative burden for participants and caseworkers. In addition many participants receive benefits from other programs that have different program rules, adding to the complexity of accurately determining program benefits and eligibility. The 2002 Farm Bill introduced new options to help simplify the program. This report examines (1) which options states have chosen to implement and why, and (2) what changes local officials reported as a result of using these options. To view selected results from GAO's Web-based survey of food stamp administrators, go to www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1058SP. To view the results from the local food stamp office surveys, go to www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1059SP.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) work with the Department of Health and Human Services to (1) encourage states to explore the advantages and disadvantages of better aligning participant reporting rules, particularly for Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and (2) provide information to states on the opportunities for better aligning reporting rules. In comments on GAO's draft report, FNS officials agreed with our recommendations and said they plan to explore ways to align participant reporting rules. www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-916.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sigurd Nilsen, (202) 512-7215 nilsens@gao.gov.

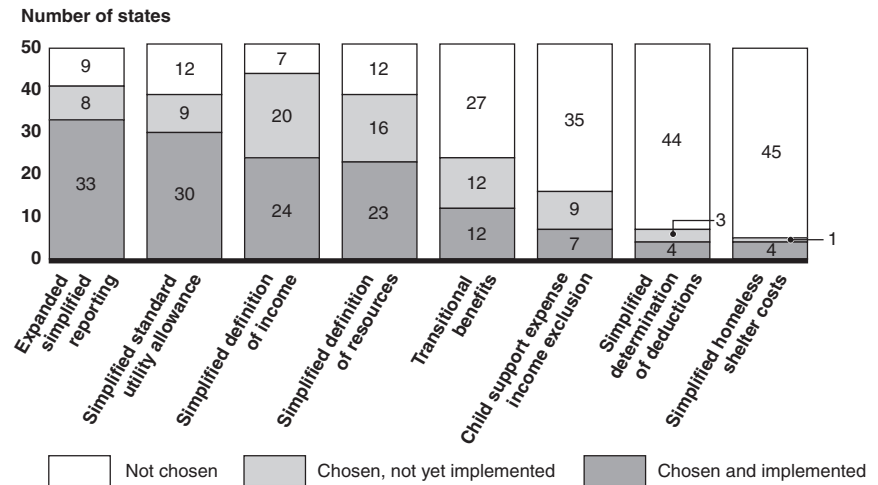
FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Farm Bill Options Ease Administrative Burden, but Opportunities Exist to Streamline Participant Reporting Rules among Programs

What GAO Found

As of January 2004, states chose four of the eight Farm Bill options with greater frequency than the others. These options provided states with more flexibility in requiring participants to report changes and in determining eligibility.

Number of States That Have Chosen, Implemented, or Not Chosen Farm Bill Options as of January 2004



Source: GAO analysis of survey data.

The most common reasons state officials gave for choosing the eight options were to simplify program rules for participants and caseworkers.

Local food stamp officials reported mixed results from implementing the Farm Bill options. Although they reported some improvements for both caseworkers and participants from some options, no option received consistent positive reports in all the areas where state officials expected improvements. In fact, in many cases, officials were as likely to report that an option resulted in no change as they were to report improvements.

Moreover, many local officials reported that three options introduced complications in program rules. One option that offered the most promise because it was selected by most states and affects a large number of participants resulted in food stamp participant reporting rules that differed from Medicaid and TANF. These differences resulted in confusion for food stamp participants and caseworkers, and some changes were made that undermined the intended advantages of the option. These problems reflect the challenge of trying to simplify rules for one program without making the rules of other related programs the same. Concerns about whether there are costs associated with aligning reporting rules may hinder a state's decision to pursue alignment; yet the extent to which program costs might increase as a result of making reporting rules the same is unclear.