

**Barriers to Food Stamps
For the Thai Community in Los Angeles County**

Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC)

A client project submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirement for the degree
Masters of Arts in Urban Planning

By

Jennifer S. Wang
Graduate Student
Department of Urban Planning
Jsw72579@aol.com
2004

Executive Summary

The Food Stamp Program (FSP), administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was created as a basic safety net and aimed at improving the nutrition, alleviating hunger, and providing food security for the poor. A recent study found that in the United States, California ranks last in signing people up for food stamp services. The number of residents receiving food stamps remained flat while the unemployment rate increased. In contrast, other states increased their participation in the FSP. In fact, the food stamp enrollment increased 9.1 percent nationally, while the number of California residents participating in the program fell by 4.4 percent.¹

The goal of this report is to examine the relationships between the food stamp participation of poor Thais in Los Angeles County and barriers that affect their access to the Food Stamp Program.² This report presents an analysis of the current economic and social status of Thais, perceptions of the FSP, and operational aspects of the FSP that affect accessibility, from outreach practices to the structure of the application process. The key issue concerns the extent to which barriers affect poor Thai individuals and households' decisions to utilize food stamps.

To address this issue it was necessary to collect information to describe the characteristics of participant and non-participant households, and the reasons why some eligible households do not participate in the FSP. Using data collected from the U.S. Census , focus groups, and interviews.

The major findings are that barriers to food stamp participation are prevalent for impoverished Thais, leading to significant underutilization in the county. Participation barriers

¹ *California ranks last in enrolling food stamp recipients.* The Mercury News, San Jose. May. 12, 2003.

² Los Angeles County is defined by metropolitan area 4480.

for Thais include lack of knowledge about food stamps, low English language proficiency, lack of local food stamps office policies and practices competency, lack of culturally appropriate outreach campaigns, individual and community level cultural factors (such as pride or shame), and logistical factors (such as the lack of transportation and childcare).

The report is divided into five parts. First, a background section examines the and the Thai community's history. Second, I include a brief methodology section. Third, I discuss the socioeconomic status and food stamps usage of the Thai immigrants. Fourth, using an analysis of the focus groups and interviews I discuss the barriers Thai immigrants face in utilizing food stamps. Lastly, the report provides policy recommendations, drawn from these results.

The findings help to inform how to improve the access to public assistance, improve the effectiveness of outreach, and enhance the overall quality of life for poor Thais in the County. This study was designed to help policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders improve access to the FSP for Thais in need. This report provides an example of the well-being of immigrants in Los Angeles County. An important implication this report provides is examining how well the County is providing for its immigrant communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Research Objectives	6
Data Collection	6
Background	8
<i>Welfare Reform</i>	
<i>Thai Immigration</i>	
Profiles and Food Stamp Utilization	11
Barriers	15
<i>Language</i>	
<i>Transportation</i>	
<i>Uncertainty about the eligibility rules</i>	
<i>Hostility</i>	
<i>Shame</i>	
<i>Mandatory Reporting</i>	
<i>Chaotic Office</i>	
<i>Office Hours</i>	
<i>Reapplication</i>	
Recommendations	23
Conclusion	26