

Performance Standards for the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program

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Foreword


The Food Stamp Employment and Training Program (FSET) was designed to reduce food stamp outlays by increasing the employment and earnings of able-bodied food stamp recipients. The States operate FSET with funding and guidance from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

To hold the States accountable for their implementation of FSET, Congress directed FNS to develop performance standards in the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-435). The law directs FNS to develop standards based on outcomes, such as job placements, and to offer the States financial rewards and sanctions, based on their attainment of these standards.

As required by the Hunger Prevention Act, FNS proposed its performance standards for FSET on August 30, 1991. This report, *Performance Standards for the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program*, was also mandated in the Hunger Prevention Act. As required by the act, this report describes OTA's model performance standards and compares OTA's model standards to those proposed by FNS.

However, measuring the effectiveness of FSET, or any employment and training program, requires that a distinction be made between outcomes and impacts. Although employment is the desired *outcome* of such programs, many welfare recipients find employment on their own. Studies using an experimental design show that some employment and training programs have had a significant, positive *impact*, helping more welfare recipients find jobs than would have without assistance. However, a study by Abt Associates found that FSET had no impact on the earnings of food stamp recipients.

Because performance standards are based on outcomes, they do not show whether a program has in fact increased employment and earnings beyond that which would have occurred without it. Thus, no performance standards, neither those proposed by FNS nor OTA's model standards, can measure whether State FSET programs are having an impact. This report, then, goes beyond the original mandate and analyzes successful employment and training programs. Based on this analysis, the report identifies several alternative approaches to increasing the impact of FSET.



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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the reviewers. The reviewers do not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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