

FoodChange

Nutrition. Education. Financial Empowerment.

Immigrant Access to the Food Stamp Program:

*An In-depth Analysis of New York City's Immigrant Communities,
Estimates of Unmet Need and Barriers to Access.*



By Elizabeth McCarthy and Almas Sayeed

Photograph by Sevenju Pepper

Table of Contents

ACCESS TO THE FEDERAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM:	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION	3
SECTION II: IMMIGRANT ELIGIBILITY IN NEW YORK CITY	4
Immigrant Eligibility and Federal Food Policy Changes	4
Federal Food Stamp Eligibility Before and After Food Stamp Reauthorization Act Restorations	5
Undocumented Immigrants Receiving Public Benefits	5
Citizen Children of Undocumented Immigrants	5
New York City Profile.	5
Immigrants and Food Insecurity	6
Labor Force Participation and Food Insecurity.	6
High Housing Costs and Food Insecurity	7
Lack of Health Insurance and Food Insecurity	7
SECTION III: IMMIGRANT ACCESS TO FOOD STAMP BENEFITS IN NEW YORK CITY	9
A Geographical Analysis	9
New York City	9
The Bronx.	9
Brooklyn	9
Manhattan.	9
Queens	10
Staten Island	10
SECTION IV: BARRIERS TO IMMIGRANT ACCESS TO THE FEDERAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM	17
Community Perspectives	17
Lack of Awareness and Outreach about the Federal Food Stamp Program	17
Language Barriers	18
Fear of Deportation	19
Reporting Status to Authorities.	19
Fear of “Public Charge” Determinations	20
Discrimination and Fear of Government Agencies.	21
Operational Barriers	21
Location-based Barriers	21
Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	21
Documentation Requirements	22
Misapplication of Immigration Rules and Documentation Requirements	22
SECTION V: WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD—MOBILIZING NATIONAL AND NEW YORK CITY	23
Leaders to Improve Immigrant Access to the Food Stamp Program	23
Policy-Based Recommendations	23
National.	23
New York City	23
Outreach-Based Recommendations	23
National.	23
New York City	24
APPENDIX	28
Appendix I: Federal Food Stamp Eligibility Before and After 2002 Farm Bill Restorations	28
Appendix II: Methodological Appendix for Estimates of New York City’s Foreign Born Non-Citizens Eligible and not Participating in the Federal Food Stamp Program	29
Step 1: Determine the number of people who are income-eligible.	29
Step 2: Determine those who are eligible by income and immigration status	30
Step 3: Determine Number of eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources	31
Step 4: Determine number of Legal Permanent Residents who are eligible and not participating	31
REFERENCES	32

Executive Summary

Although New York City has a thriving immigrant population, many members of the immigrant community suffer from high rates of poverty, job instability and food insecurity. At the same time, immigrants have lower rates of participation in the Federal Food Stamp Program compared to the native-born. To examine the City's low rates of immigrant participation, FoodChange, one of New York City's largest anti-poverty, non-profit organizations, commissioned two Congressional Hunger Center Fellows for a six month project to assess immigrant access to the Food Stamp Program (FSP). This paper highlights the results of the study. It examines both the number and location of immigrants eligible and not participating in the FSP, and outlines a series of barriers identified by City advocates that disproportionately impact immigrant populations. The goal of the report is to identify the immigrant communities most in need of food stamp benefits in New York City and to strategize ways in which anti-poverty and immigrants' rights advocates can collaborate to increase program participation at the city, state and national levels.

Analyzing population and food stamp participation data, the report finds that in New York City more than 700,000 people are eligible for benefits yet do not participate in the program. Almost a quarter of these people, over 180,000, are eligible non-participating immigrants. The highest concentrations of these eligible immigrants are in Coney Island and West Queens. The report includes maps that highlight the neighborhoods and zip codes with the highest concentrations of eligible non-participating immigrants for New York City and each of the five boroughs.

In addition, the report finds that systematic and institutional barriers prevent immigrants in New York City from accessing food stamp benefits. To identify these barriers, FoodChange conducted 30 interviews with community-based organizations, policy institutions, legal advocacy centers and elected officials working with immigrant communities in New York City. A majority of advocates and policy experts agree that a lack of awareness, language inaccessibility, fear of deportation and "public charge" determinations, operational inefficiencies, and the misapplication of immigration restrictions are the primary barriers for immigrants accessing food stamp benefits. Further data indicate that immigrant families, especially those with young children, are most affected by the rising rates of food insecurity.

The final component of this project summarizes the results of a half-day conference, organized by FoodChange, with elected officials, city and federal Food Stamp Program administrators, and community leaders from anti-poverty and immigrants' rights organizations. These stakeholders convened to discuss FoodChange's findings and to devise policy and outreach recommendations to increase immigrant participation in the Food Stamp Program. Some of these recommendations include: eliminating all eligibility restrictions in place for immigrant populations, increasing access to online applications and improving outreach materials so that they address immigrant-specific concerns. A full list of these recommendations is included in the conclusion of this report.

Acknowledgements

FoodChange's "Immigrant Access to Food Stamps in New York City" project was completed with the technical assistance of the Food Access Unit. We would particularly like to thank: Richard Murphy, Jodi Harawitz, Nicole Christensen, Lee Davenport, Marjory Garrison and Magdalena Nadar. Our special thanks to Gregory Paulos, Program Manager of the Food Access Unit, for providing patient guidance and insight. We would also like to extend our gratitude to FoodChange's dedicated outreach workers who help ensure that New Yorkers gain access to food stamp benefits. A special thanks to Carlos Rodriguez, from New York's Children's Defense Fund and to Barbara Weiner, from the Empire Justice Center, who provided invaluable insight throughout the project and did an extensive review of the final report. We are also grateful to Rebecca Widom of the Urban Justice Center, Randy Rosso of the Food Research and Action Center, and Peter Lobo of New York City's Department of City Planning, all of whom collaborated with FoodChange to produce the final formula used in our research. Also, our thanks goes to Ben Wikler for insightful edits and Sevenju Pepper for photographs used during the presentation and in the report. To all of our interviewees, thank you for sharing your wisdom and experience; we hope this work reflects the struggle and effort you put forth on a daily basis to reach those in need. Finally, we would like to thank all of the participants in the "Immigrant Access to Food Stamps Forum," which was held on January 11, 2006. To complete the second half of the report, FoodChange conducted interviews with the following offices and organizations.

African Services Committee
Allianza Dominicana
American Association of Jews from the Former USSR
Arab-American Family Support Center
Arthur Garfield Hays Civil Liberties Program, New York University
Center for Community Problem Solving, New York University
Children's Defense Fund
Chinese American Planning Council
Citizens Advice Bureau - South Bronx
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Community Services Society
Emerald Isle Immigration Center
Empire Justice Center
FoodChange (Food Access Unit)
Forrest Hills Community House
Legal Aid Society
Legal Services of New York City, Legal Support Unit
Make the Road by Walking
Neighbors Helping Neighbors
New York Legal Aid Society
National Immigration Farming Initiative
New York City Coalition Against Hunger
New York Immigration Coalition
Office of Felix Ortiz, Assembly Member
Office of Representative Jose Serrano, U.S. House of Representatives
Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council
South Asian Council for Social Services
Tamkeen
Urban Justice Center
Young Korean American Service

Section I: Introduction

More than one in ten American families has trouble putting food on the table — and the number is growing. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 11.9%, or 13.5 million, households reported some level of food insecurity in 2004.¹ The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a public policy and advocacy organization, explains that “food insecurity” refers to the lack of access to the quantity of food necessary to fully meet basic needs at all times due to low financial resources.² Of those households considered food insecure, the USDA reports that 3.9%, or 4.4 million, are considered “hungry,” or face chronic malnutrition that can lead to long-term developmental and psychological problems affecting productivity, health status, and family life.³ FRAC further reports that poverty and low-income levels compromise household food security.

The U.S. immigrant population is disproportionately affected by these high rates of food insecurity as well as significant rates of poverty and job instability. The United States Census notes that in 2004, the rate of poverty among foreign-born non-citizens was 21.6% compared to 12.1% among the native-born.⁴ This disparity persists despite high rates of immigrant participation in the labor force. At the national level, immigrants constitute 11% of all U.S. residents, but 14% of all workers and 20% of all low-wage workers.⁵ In total, immigrants head approximately 20% of all low-income households.⁶ The Children’s Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program reports that in a 2003 national assessment, immigrant-headed families were more than twice as vulnerable to household food insecurity as U.S. citizen-headed families, with food insecurity rates of 39% compared to 16% for U.S.-born families.⁷ Although the national economy is dependent on immigrant labor, the National Immigration Law Center reports that many immigrant laborers face significant challenges, such as limited English proficiency, job insecurity and poorly enforced labor laws.⁸

Participation in the Federal Food Stamp Program offsets the risks of food insecurity associated with poverty and low-wages. Households that participate in the Food Stamp Program report reduced levels of hunger and food insecurity, as well as improved economic, educational and health outcomes.⁹ Yet, immigrants face significant barriers when trying to access the Federal Food Stamp Program. For example, in 2001, only 40% of eligible non-citizens and 34% of citizen children living with non-citizen adults participated in the Food Stamp Program, compared to 62% of all eligible populations.¹⁰ Federal eligibility restrictions and systematic program barriers prevent many immigrant families from accessing the benefits to which they are entitled.

This report aims to assess immigrant access to the Federal Food Stamp Program in New York City. The study collected information about immigrant access to the Food Stamp Program through a quantitative assessment of the number of eligible, non-participating, foreign-born non-citizens throughout New York City’s five boroughs and a series of in-depth interviews with New York City’s anti-poverty and immigrant rights’ advocates. Throughout the report, we use the terms “immigrant” and “foreign-born non-citizen” interchangeably.¹¹

The report is composed of three parts. Sections one and two provide background information on immigrant eligibility and participation in the Food Stamp Program for New York City. We discuss how recent policy changes have left many immigrant families and their children vulnerable to food and job insecurity, rising housing costs and limited health insurance coverage. Section three details our research estimating the location and number of eligible immigrants not participating in the Food Stamp Program. We present maps of this data for the entire City of New York and for each of the five boroughs. In the final two sections, we outline some of the barriers immigrants experience as they try to access food stamp benefits in New York City. Drawing on a series of interviews with community leaders and advocates, we offer some explanations for why these barriers, which affect all populations, are particularly arduous for immigrant applicants. We conclude with policy recommendations to address these problems.

Section II: Immigrant Eligibility in New York City

Immigrant Eligibility and Federal Food Policy Changes

In recent history, U.S. immigrant eligibility for public benefit programs has been the subject of extensive debate and policy regulation. When the Federal Food Stamp Program was implemented in 1964, most lawfully residing immigrants were eligible for participation in the program. This policy was reversed in 1996 with the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, also known as “PRWORA” or the “Welfare Reform Act,” which barred almost all legal immigrants from access to food stamps and the Supplemental Security Income Program, a federal benefit that provides assistance to the blind and disabled people that have no income. With the passage of PRWORA, only those legal permanent residents who could be credited with 40 qualifying work quarters in the Social Security system, active duty service members, honorably discharged veterans and their dependents, Canadian-born Native-Americans and certain members of Hmong or Highland Laotian tribes were considered eligible for participation in the program. The eligibility of refugees, asylees, Amerasians and persons granted withholding of deportation was limited to five years from their date of entry.

In a study of the impact of Welfare Reform on low-income households, Harvard University Professor, George Borjas, found that among immigrant families, a 10% cutback in Food Stamp Program participation due to eligibility restrictions resulted in a 5% increase in the number of immigrant families experiencing food insecurity.¹² The eligibility restrictions particularly hurt working immigrant families and citizen-children of non-citizen adults, even though the children remained fully eligible for the program.

In the 1997 Supplemental Appropriations Act, New York established the Food Assistance Program (FAP), to provide food stamps to particularly vulnerable groups of qualified immigrants no longer eligible for the Federal Food Stamp Program. FAP initially provided assistance to children, the elderly, and the disabled.¹³ In 2001, it was amended to extend food stamp benefits to victims of domestic violence. The program was state and federally funded, and local Social Services districts were given the option to provide FAP benefits. New York City’s Human Resources Administration participated in FAP until the program was allowed to sunset at the end of September, 2005. Eligibility for program benefits was limited to those who had resided in the United States since before August 22, 1996. This restriction was successfully challenged in litigation but the decision was not reduced to a final judgment in time for implementation prior to the program sunset.

In 1998, Congress partially restored food stamp eligibility to some qualified immigrants with the Agricultural Research Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998. This Act restored food stamp eligibility to children and to elderly or disabled qualified immigrants who were lawfully residing in the U.S. on or before August 22, 1996. The time limitation on the receipt of food stamps by refugees, asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Amerasians and persons granted withholding of deportation, was extended from five to seven years from the date of entry.

In 2002, Congress restored eligibility even further with the passage of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, also known as the 2002 Farm Bill. The Bill restored eligibility to many legal immigrants who lost access to the Food Stamp Program under 1996 welfare reform, reinstating eligibility for three groups of non-citizens: qualified immigrants in receipt of certain disability-based benefits or under the age of 18, regardless of their date of entry, and all others who had been in a qualified status for at least five years. It also eliminated any time limits placed on food stamp eligibility for refugees, asylees, trafficking victims, persons granted withholding of deportation, Cuban and Haitian entrants and Amerasians.

The Food Assistance program was not reauthorized and allowed to sunset in 2005. Thus, immigrants now rely solely on the federal program for benefits. While the 2002 Farm Bill broadened the number of eligible immigrants, it added another layer of complexity to the already dense food stamp policy and further complicated the training requirements for food stamp and outreach workers. Included in the appendix is a summary of immigrant eligibility before and after the passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act.

Federal Food Stamp Eligibility Before and After Food Stamp Reauthorization Act Restorations

Undocumented Immigrants Receiving Public Benefits

Despite their exclusion from all federal and most state benefit programs, there is a general misconception that undocumented immigrants are eligible for and receive federal food stamps. In addition to information we gathered from interviews with community advocates, recent political debate suggests that many people both inside and outside of the government believe immigrants exploit the public benefits system. Yet, extensive data indicate this is not the case.

With the exception of a limited number of programs, including Emergency Medicaid and pregnancy related medical care, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for state and federal public benefits. Only qualified immigrants who meet certain criteria are eligible for federal benefits other than Emergency Medicaid. Jonathan Blazer, a public benefits attorney with the National Immigration Law Center, comments, “[The current] framing of [immigrant access to food stamps] continues a campaign that has included Agriculture Committee [members] giving the impression that food stamp cuts have something to do with illegal immigration or illegal immigrants fraudulently obtaining food stamps, a claim that is erroneous.” He further adds that the cuts hurt those immigrants who “pay taxes, have children in the military and contribute positively to society.”¹⁴

Moreover, a recent study published by the Urban Institute disputes the claim that many immigrants fraudulently receive food stamps. The report concedes that a small number of undocumented immigrants may receive food stamps due to errors made by eligibility workers; however, no evidence exists to suggest the erroneous receipt of food stamps by ineligible applicants is systematic. As evidence of this, researcher Leighton Ku points to the extensive documentation assessments that exist within the system to prevent fraud, noting that “the immigration status of all non-citizen applicants for public benefits programs such as Food Stamps and Medicaid is verified, pursuant to guidelines promulgated by the Attorney General, to prevent participation by ineligible applicants.”¹⁵ In addition, this documentation is checked against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) databases to confirm eligibility and block undocumented non-citizens from receiving food stamp benefits. Targeting undocumented immigrants in national and political debate exacerbates fears that already prevent many parents of citizen children from accessing vital benefits, such as food stamps.

Citizen Children of Undocumented Immigrants

Citizen children of undocumented parents – who never lost eligibility for public assistance programs – are often overlooked in debates regarding immigrant access to benefit programs. After the 1996 restrictions were implemented, rates of participation among citizen-children of immigrant parents fell. Yet citizen children of immigrants represent a growing proportion of all children, constituting 22% of the 23.4 million children under 6 years of age. The Urban Institute reports that 93% of all children of immigrants under the age of 6 are citizens, and 77% of children in immigrant families aged 6 to 17 are citizens.¹⁶ The majority of these children live in mixed status families, and approximately one quarter of young children (under 6 years) have undocumented parents.¹⁷

Although citizen children of immigrant parents are eligible for food stamp benefits and other social programs, research suggests that undocumented parents may be reluctant to access publicly funded programs on behalf of their children due to fear of deportation or a perceived impact on their immigration status (see section “Barriers to Immigrant Access”). As a result, children of immigrants use public benefits less often than children of natives, despite higher rates of economic hardship. An estimated 56% of young children of immigrants are low-income versus 40% of young children of natives.¹⁸ At the same time, low-income children under 6 years of age with native-born parents are twice as likely to receive Food Stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits compared to young, low-income, citizen children with immigrant parents.¹⁹ Because of the demonstrated benefits of the Food Stamp Program, increasing citizen children’s participation could substantially enhance the health and well-being of the country’s future.

New York City Profile

The Federal Food Stamp Program is an integral part of New York City's safety net, helping families gain access to nutritious foods and offsetting other costs such as medical expenses and housing. Although Food Stamp Program participation is higher now than when Mayor Bloomberg took office in 2002, participation rates in the FSP still do not match the reported need associated with rising rates of poverty, hunger and food insecurity in New York City. Data from the Human Resources Administration indicates that Food Stamp Program participation is 27% lower than it was at the time of peak participation in 1995.²⁰

Although food stamp participation remains below reported levels of need, New York City's immigrant population is quickly increasing. The City's Department of City Planning (DCP) reports that between 1965 and 2000, the City's foreign-born population nearly doubled, from 1.44 million to 2.87 million.²¹ Today, there are approximately 1.5 million legal permanent residents in New York City and approximately 300,000 refugees.²² While the highest concentration of the foreign-born are from the Dominican Republic, there are significant populations from China, Jamaica, Guyana and the former Soviet Union.

Many of New York City's immigrant groups report high poverty rates. Mexicans (32%), Dominicans and Bangladeshis (31%), Hondurans (28%) and Pakistanis (26%) all report much higher rates of poverty than the city's average of approximately 20%.²³ Similar to national data, the DCP reports that the median household income in native-born households is significantly higher than in foreign-born households, and immigrants experience higher rates of poverty than their native-born counterparts, particularly upon initial entry into the United States.²⁴ The different rates of poverty among immigrant groups is explained by several factors, including an individual's socio-economic background in their country of origin, systems of support upon arrival and ability to navigate U.S. systems such as the job market.

Immigrants and Food Insecurity

Food insecurity among immigrants is increasingly widespread in New York City. A survey conducted by the Urban Institute reports that approximately one-third of all low-income immigrant families in New York City report some level of food insecurity. The survey notes that about half of New York City's immigrant families with incomes below twice the poverty line reported they had run out of food either sometimes or often over the course of the previous year. By contrast, about one third of low-income citizen families reported that adults had reduced the size of their meals in the previous year due to economic problems.²⁵ In addition, half of all single-parent immigrant families with children in New York City reported some level of food insecurity, compared to only about 35% of two-parent immigrant families.²⁶ Although the Urban Institute survey took place before the 2002 Farm Bill restored some benefit access to legal permanent residents, our study of participation rates confirms that systematic barriers affect eligible immigrants' access to the Food Stamp Program in New York City.

Labor Force Participation and Food Insecurity

Similar to national trends, labor force participation among immigrants in New York City is high. The DCP reports that in 2000, New York City's immigrant males had a higher labor force participation rate (67%) than their native-born counterparts (63%). Among immigrants, three Asian groups had the highest rates of labor force participation: Indians (76%), Bangladeshis and Filipinos (both with 74%).²⁷ At the same time, immigrant females had a labor force participation rate of approximately 52%.²⁸ Unfortunately, labor force participation does not necessarily lead to economic security. For example, while Bangladeshis are among the highest represented in labor force participation rates, they also have one of the highest rates of poverty.

Recently, the New York Times reported that this type of economic disadvantage was not always a reality for immigrant laborers. In the past, immigrant workers found work in the manufacturing, shipping and industrial sectors that offered fair wages as well as some health and retirement benefits. In the current economic climate, this same category of low-wage immigrant workers are disproportionately represented in service-sector jobs that pay minimum wage and often

provide few or no benefits. Frank J. Franz, president of the Belmont Small Business Association in the Bronx, states: “The typical jobs for immigrants with health benefits and union benefits don’t exist anymore.”²⁹ Until the economic market changes significantly for low-wage earners, immigrant workers will continually be exposed to job volatility and economic insecurity, affecting all areas of their lives.

High Housing Costs and Food Insecurity

Immigrant families in New York City report significantly higher rates of food insecurity due to high housing costs. In a recent survey almost one-fifth of low-income immigrants in New York City reported problems paying their rent, mortgage or utilities, affecting their ability to purchase food. In contrast, only about 8% of low-income citizen families in New York City reported similar problems meeting rent and housing costs.³⁰ Advocates we interviewed repeatedly echoed this sentiment. As one advocate succinctly put it, “in New York people have to make sacrifices, deciding between having a place to live or to eat.”

In addition to skimping on meals and other necessities such as clothing and child care costs, advocates report that many families make the strategic decision to “double up” in housing units, with two or three families sharing one- or two-bedroom apartments. One advocate working in Washington Heights explains, “To afford rent, there are four-person families who share one room in apartments with other families in communities throughout this section of Manhattan.” Since such housing arrangements are illegal, families have a difficult time obtaining proof of rent payments. These types of living configurations also create unsafe or compromising conditions for immigrant families.

Disabled, elderly and single-parent households within immigrant communities are the hardest hit by high housing costs and food insecurity.³¹ Because many of these households are reliant on fixed incomes, it is nearly impossible for them to keep pace with the rapidly rising household costs in New York City. An advocate who works with Central and Eastern European immigrants in Brooklyn states:

The primary concern for our clients is housing. Most of our clients are elderly people, many of whom are over 60-years-old. Our organization conducted a survey of our clients and community members. Of over 1,000 clients, over 55% reported that 75% to 100% of their monthly income goes into rent and utilities. This forces the elderly to spend less money on food and decreases the quality of food. Many [of our clients] receive food stamps to offset these costs. It is a necessity for them to live.

For many households in New York City, participation in the Food Stamp Program offsets high housing and rent costs, improving participants’ food security and health.

Lack of Health Insurance and Food Insecurity

Despite evidence that suggests a family’s health insurance coverage directly impacts a family’s level of food security and overall well-being, immigrant families disproportionately lack health insurance coverage.³² At the national level, low-income non-citizens are more than twice as likely to be uninsured as low-income citizens. As of 2001, 60% of the 11 million low-income non-citizens in the U.S. lacked health insurance and only 13% received Medicaid. By contrast, 28% of low-income citizens were uninsured and 30% received Medicaid.³³ Because a disproportionate number of immigrants work in jobs that offer no health insurance, the gap in coverage forces many people to go without care, defer care, turn to underground providers who potentially offer poorer quality of care or, more commonly, rely on safety net programs such as Medicaid.³⁴ In a recent study carried out by researchers Robert Nielson and Steven Garasky 19% percent of families who were uninsured at any point during the two year study also experienced periods of food insecurity while only 7% of insured families reported food insecurity.³⁵

Citizen children of immigrant parents are particularly at risk of lacking healthcare coverage. These children are only half as likely as those in native families (23% versus 42%) to be covered under an employer-based health plan.³⁶ In New York,

28% of non-citizen children and 8% of citizen-children in immigrant families are uninsured, whereas only 6% of children in native citizen families are reportedly uninsured.³⁷

Changes are being made in New York State to address some of these disparities. The Facilitated Enrollment Plan, started in 2000, has already helped approximately 266,000 children and nearly 100,000 adults access health insurance through Medicaid, Family Health Plus, and Child Health Plus.³⁸ Workers in such agencies speak over 40 languages, reaching immigrant communities that previously had little or no access to benefits. Such programs help decrease the number of children and families who are uninsured, reducing their vulnerability to high rates of food insecurity.³⁹

Section III: Immigrant Access to Food Stamp Benefits in New York City

A Geographical Analysis

In addition to examining the barriers that limit immigrants' access to food stamp benefits, we derived estimates of the number of immigrants eligible and not participating (ENPs) in the Food Stamp Program.

To determine estimates for each zip code, we compiled data from the 2000 Census, New York City's Department of City Planning and New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA). For a more detailed explanation of the formula, please see Methodological Appendix II, included at the end of this report.

In the following sections, we outline our key findings for the city and for each of the five boroughs. The New York City map highlights the neighborhoods with the highest number of immigrant ENPs while the color shading indicates the rate of foreign-born residents within the neighborhoods' populations. The neighborhood borders are taken from the New York State Department of Health. Similarly, the five borough maps highlight the zip codes with the highest number of immigrant ENPs, and include the rate of foreign-born among all people below 130% of poverty. Again, the color shading indicates the rate of foreign-born within each zip code.

New York City

In New York City, we estimate that there are 717,457 eligible individuals not participating in the Food Stamp Program. Approximately one quarter of these, or 180,255 people, are eligible immigrants. A map of New York City's neighborhoods, located at the end of this section, indicates that the highest concentrations of immigrant ENPs are found in Brooklyn and Queens. In Brooklyn, Coney Island is the neighborhood with the highest number of immigrant ENPs with 14,319 while the neighborhood of West Queens had the overall highest number of immigrant ENPs with 26,741. Using the Urban Justice Center's projection of a low to average monthly benefit of \$75 for each food stamp recipient, we estimate that the city foregoes \$646 million dollars every year due to a lack of participation in the program.⁴⁰ Approximately \$162 million of the total amount is lost specifically because eligible immigrants are not participating in the program.

The Bronx

The Bronx map displays the ten zip codes with the highest number of immigrant ENPs. In total, an estimated 27,456 eligible immigrants are not participating in the Food Stamp Program, representing \$25 million dollars lost to the Bronx economy.

Zip code 10468, in the Fordham-Bronx Park neighborhood, has the highest concentration of immigrant ENPs at 2,886, and Dominicans are the largest immigrant group in the zip code.⁴¹ In this zip code, foreign-born non-citizens comprise 26% of the zip code's total population while they represent 29% of all those living at or below 130% of the federal poverty line. The per capita income the residents in this zip code is \$11,788.⁴²

Brooklyn

In Brooklyn, there are an estimated 57,236 immigrant ENPs, equaling \$52 million federal dollars lost to the borough and the City. Although Coney Island represents the neighborhood with the highest concentration of immigrant ENPs, zip code 11226, in East Flatbush, has the highest concentration of immigrant ENPs with 6,917. Foreign-born non-citizens make up 31% of the zip code's total population while they represent 34% of all those living at or below 130% of the federal poverty line. Haitians are the most highly represented, and the per capita income in this zip code is \$13,052.⁴³

Manhattan

There are an estimated 24,213 eligible immigrants not participating in the Food Stamp Program in Manhattan, representing \$22 million lost in federal funds. Zip code 10002, located in the Lower East Side, has an estimated 4,704 immigrant ENPs. In this zip code, foreign-born non-citizens make up 30% of the zip code's total population, while they

represent 34% of all those living at or below 130% of the federal poverty line. The Chinese community is the most highly represented, and the per capita income for all residents in the zip code is \$14,236.⁴⁴

Queens

In Queens, there are 67,796 ENP immigrants, which equals approximately \$61 million in lost federal funds. An estimated 9,120 of these are in the zip code 11368, in the West Queens-Corona neighborhood where Dominicans and Ecuadorians are the most highly represented.⁴⁵ While foreign-born non-citizens represent 43% of the zip code's total population, they represent 48% of all those living at or below 130% of the federal poverty line. The per capita income for all residents in the zip code is \$12,412.⁴⁶

Staten Island

There are approximately 3,564 immigrant ENPs eligible in Staten Island, representing approximately \$3.2 million in lost revenue. Almost a quarter of these, 810 immigrant ENPs, are found in zip code 10304, which is the neighborhood of Stapleton-St. George. While foreign-born non-citizens comprise 15% of the zip code's total population, they represent 21% of the total number of people living at or below 130% of the federal poverty line. Nigerians are the largest immigrant group in the zip code, and the per capita income for all zip code residents is \$21,828.⁴⁷

Neighborhoods in New York City with the Highest Number of Eligible Immigrants Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program

Produced by FoodChange 2005
Estimates Based on Data from
2000 Census, NYC DCP
and NYC HRA

Long Island City- Astoria
10,133

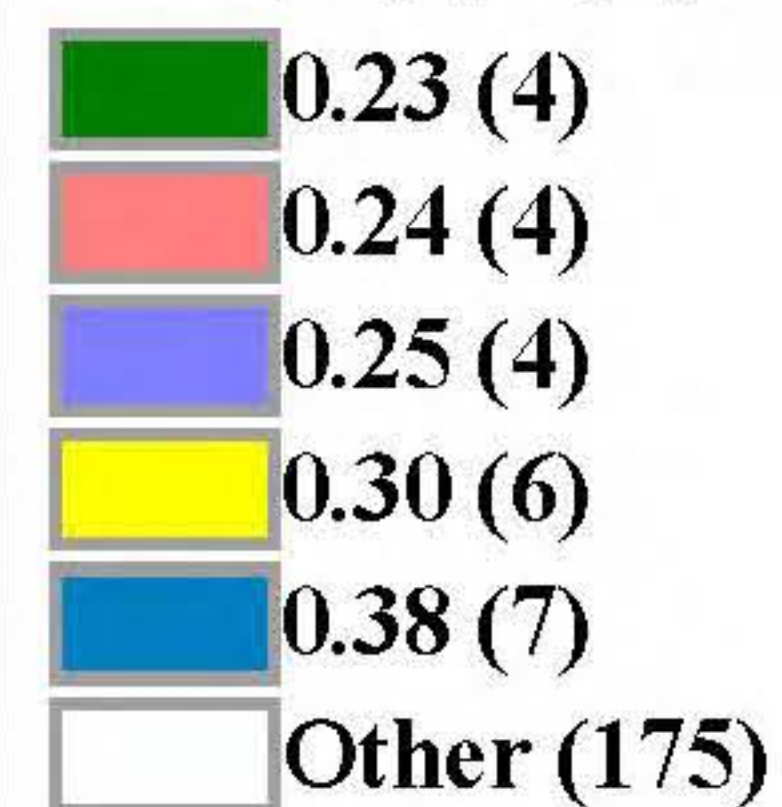
West Queens 26,741

East Flatbush
11,731

Borough Park
14,272

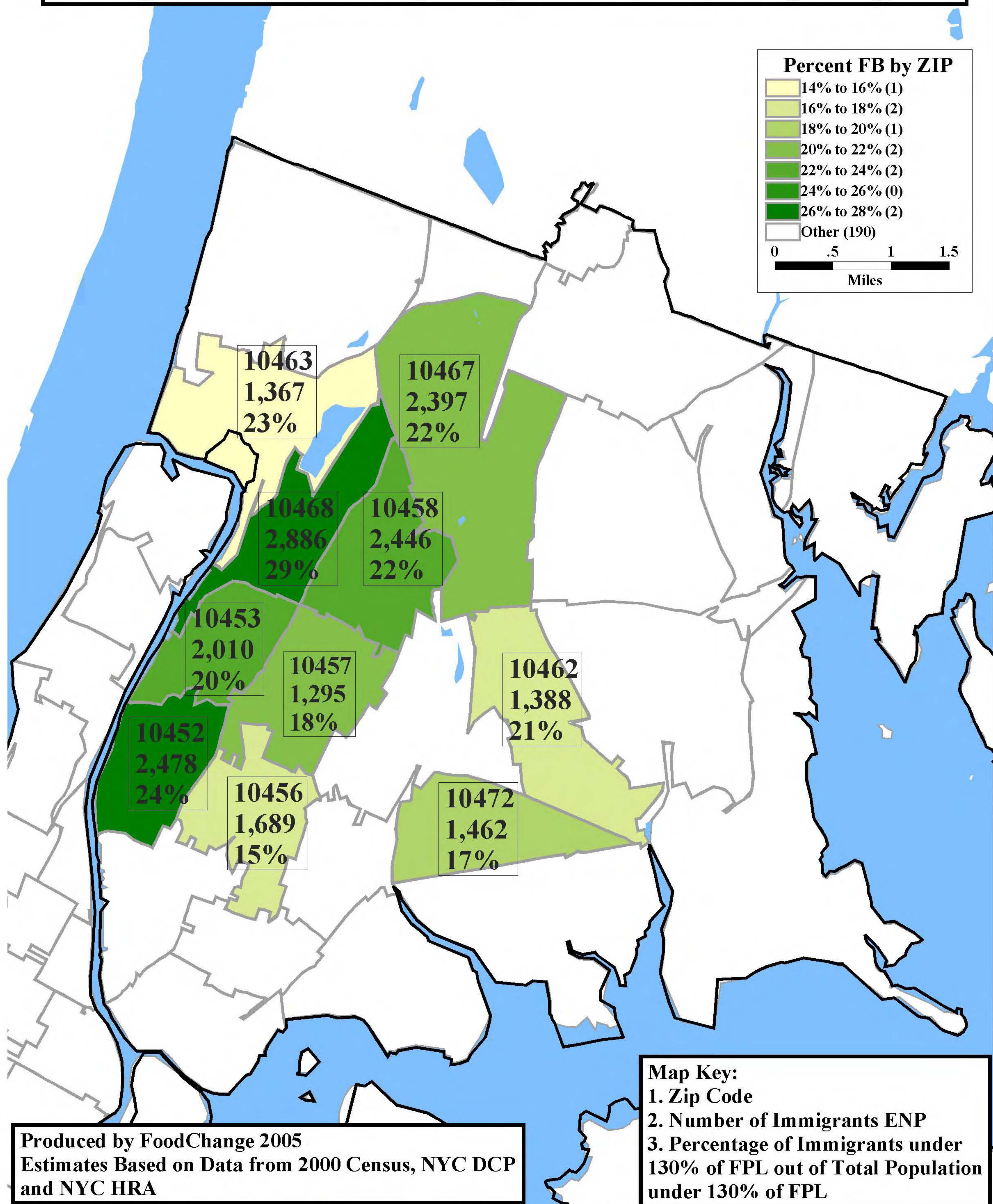
Coney Island
14,319

Percent of FB by Neighborhood

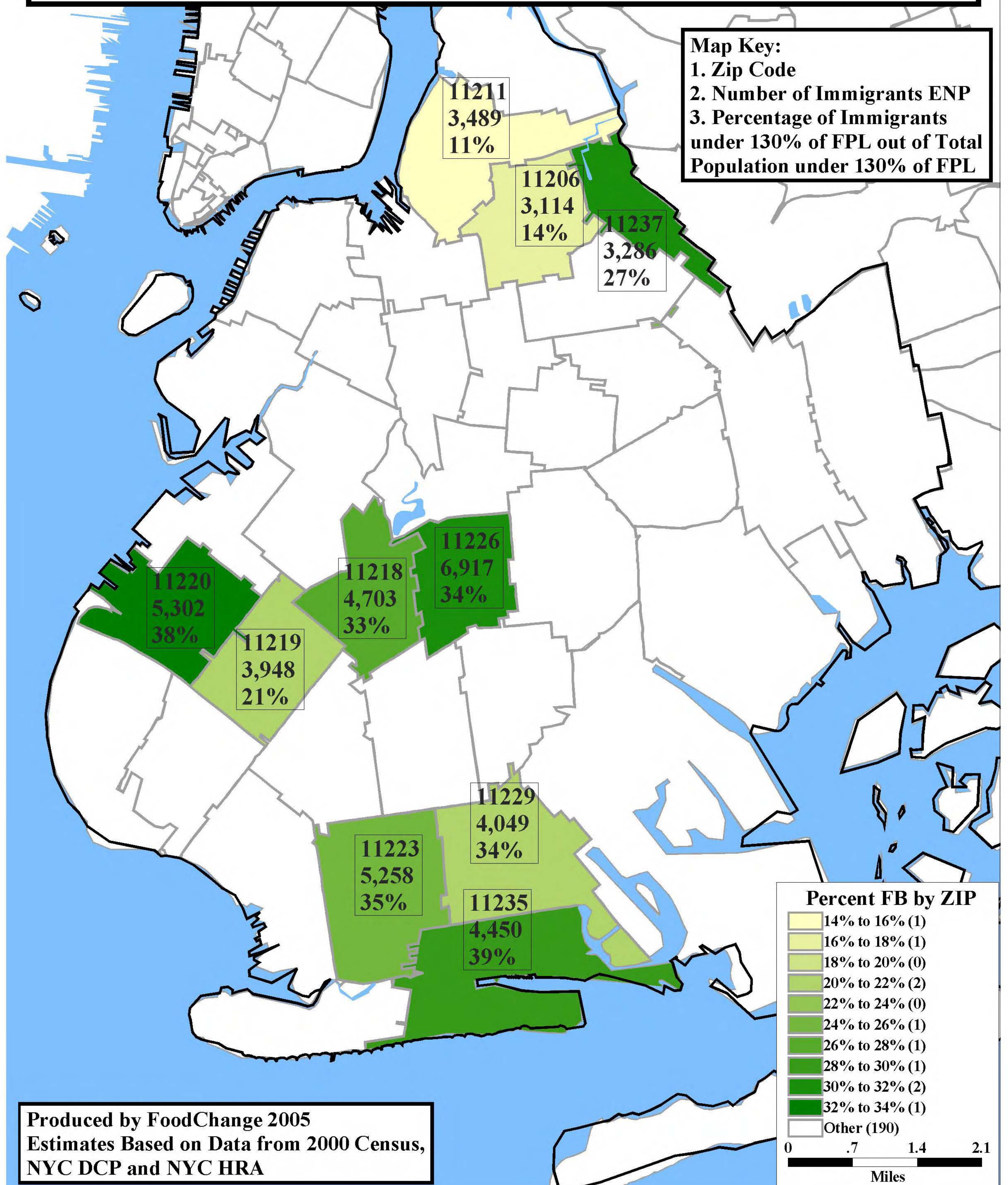


0 1 2 3
Miles

The Bronx Zip Codes with the Highest Number of Eligible Immigrants Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program

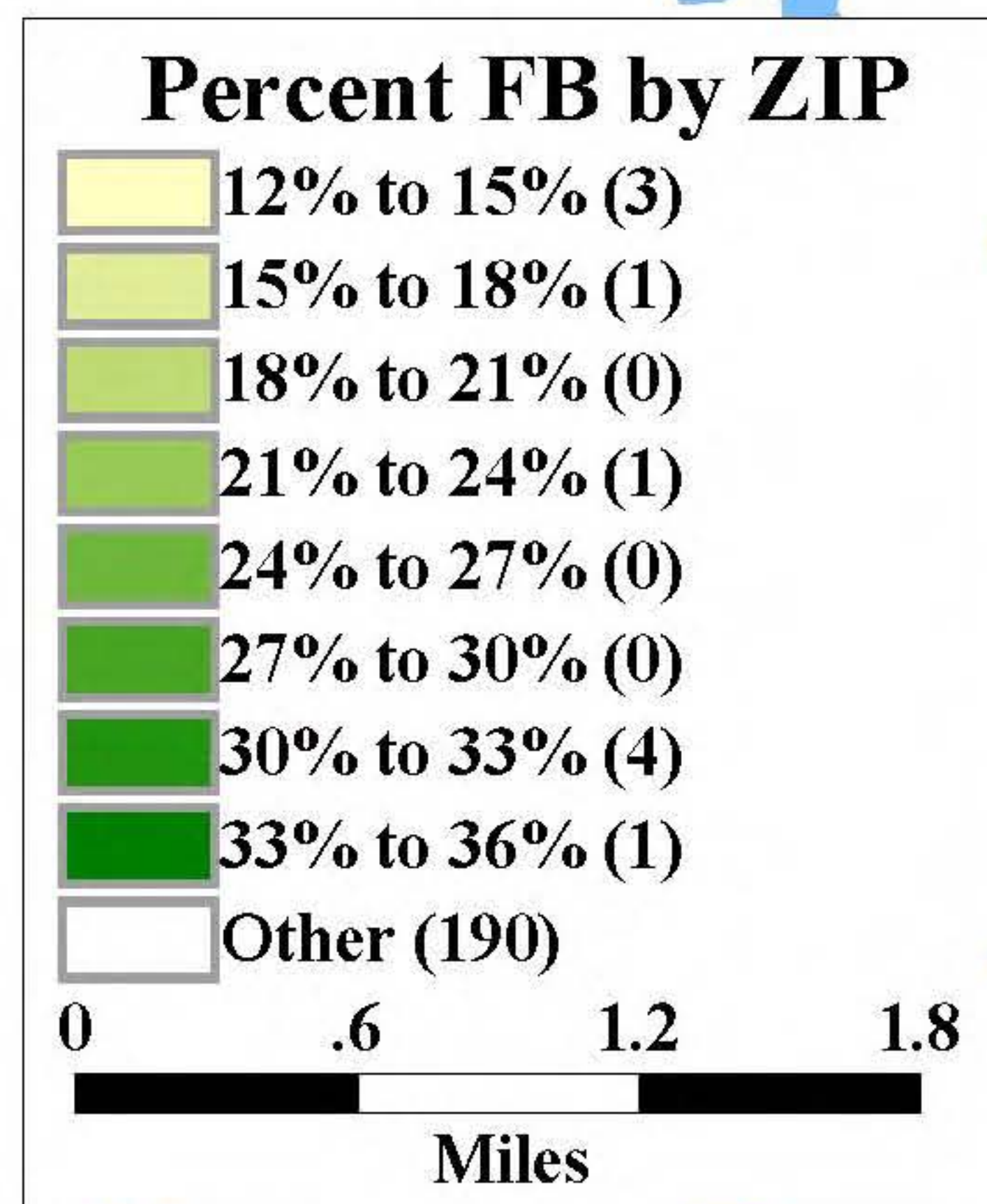


The Brooklyn Zip Codes with the Highest Number of Eligible Immigrants Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program



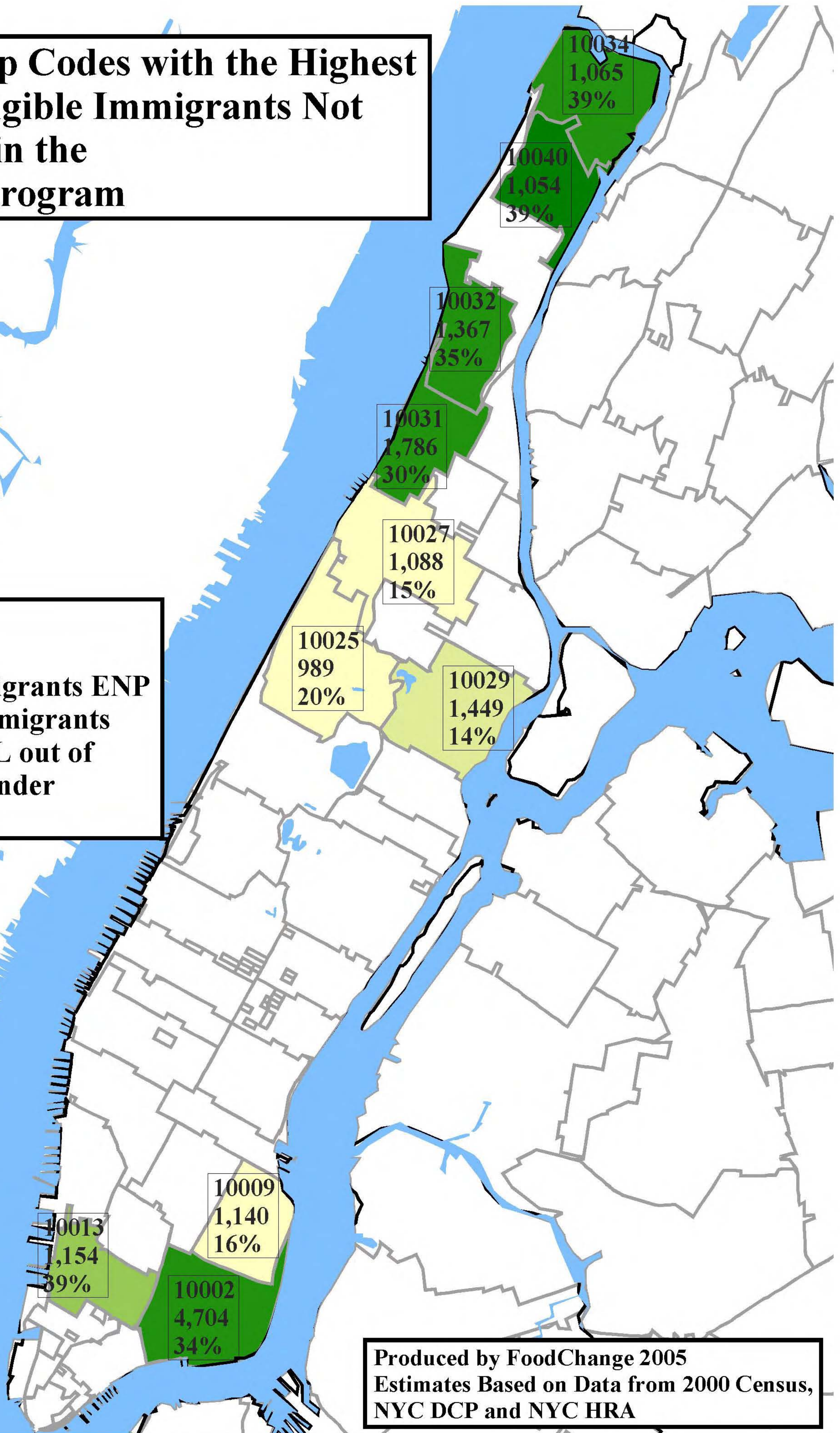
Produced by FoodChange 2005
Estimates Based on Data from 2000 Census,
NYC DCP and NYC HRA

Manhattan Zip Codes with the Highest Number of Eligible Immigrants Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program



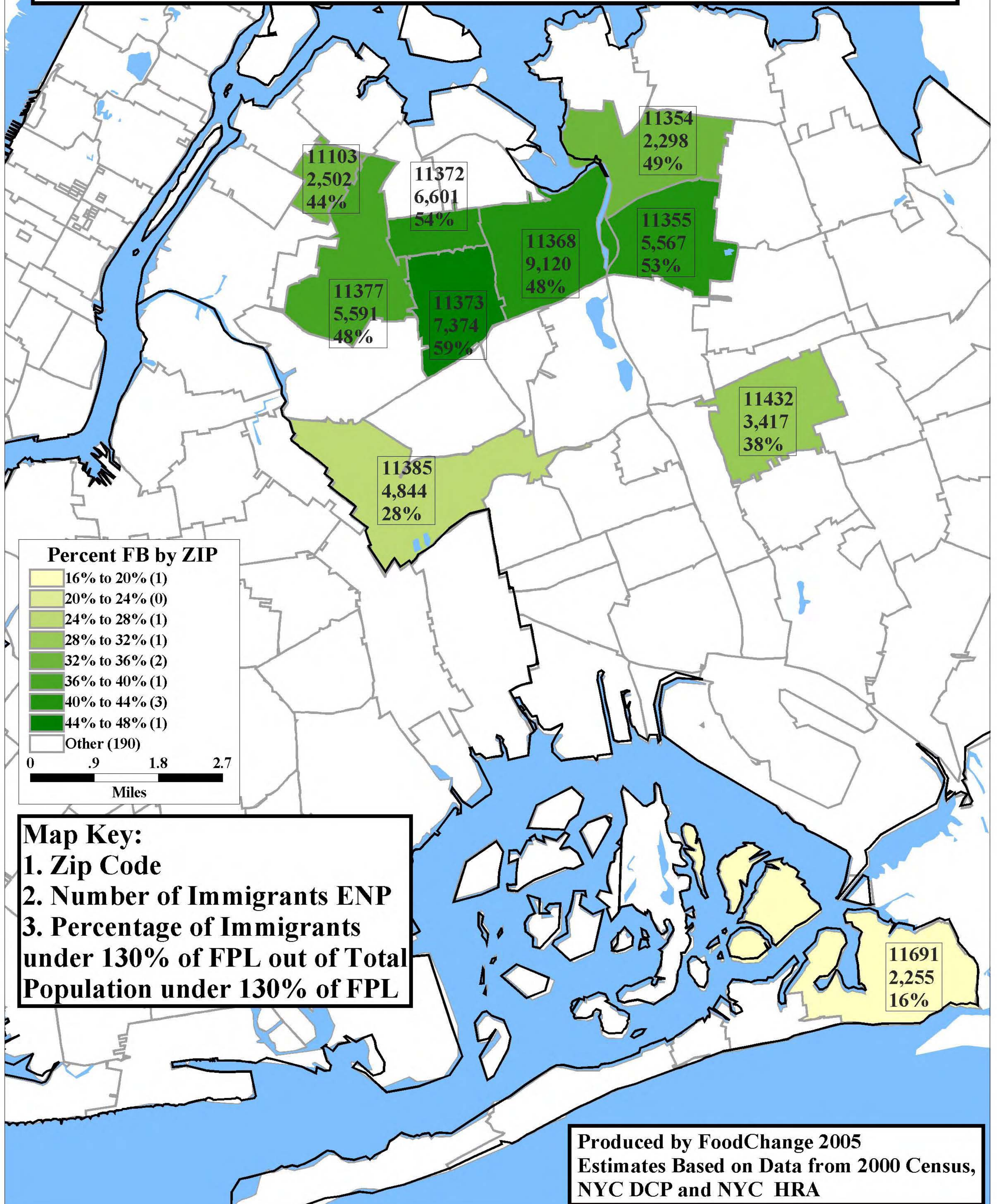
Map Key:

1. Zip Code
2. Number of Immigrants ENP
3. Percentage of Immigrants under 130% of FPL out of Total Population under 130% of FPL

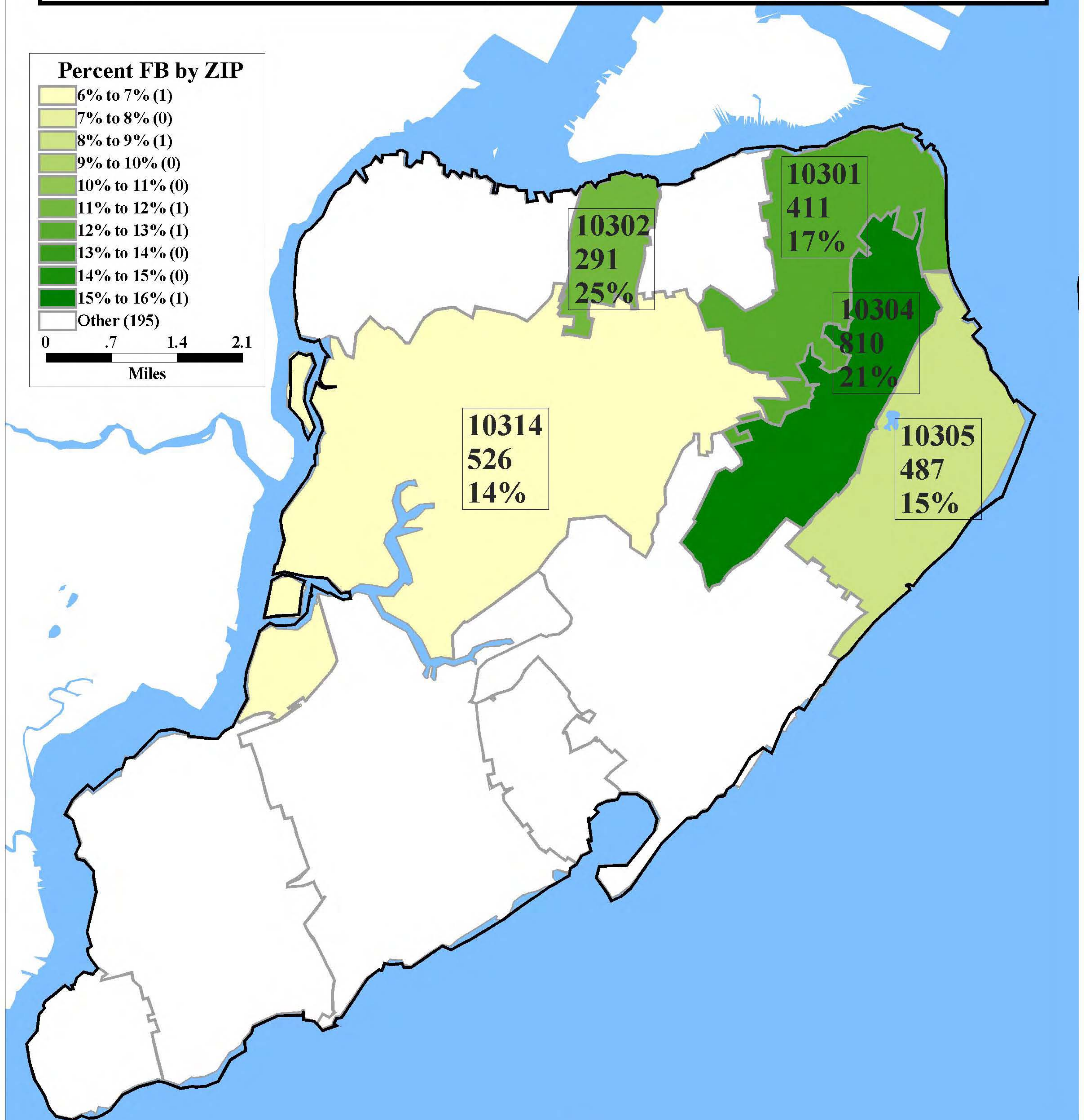
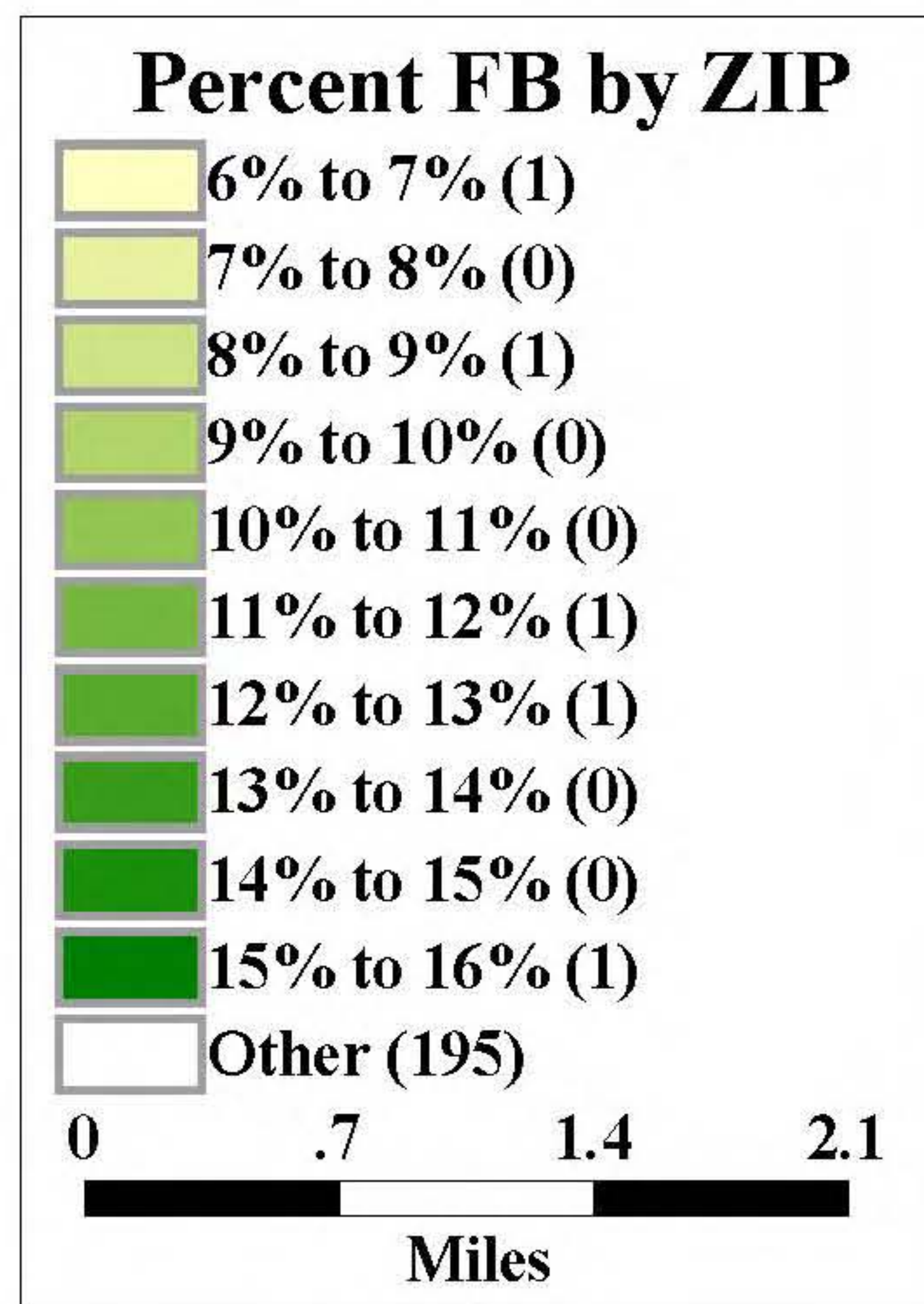


Produced by FoodChange 2005
Estimates Based on Data from 2000 Census,
NYC DCP and NYC HRA

The Queens Zip Codes with the Highest Number of Eligible Immigrants Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program



The Staten Island Zip Codes with the Highest Number of Eligible Immigrants Not Participating in the Food Stamp Program



Map Key:

1. Zip Code
2. Number of Immigrants ENP
3. Percentage of Immigrants under 130% of FPL out of Total Population under 130% of FPL

Produced by FoodChange 2005
Estimates Based on Data from 2000 Census,
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Section IV: Barriers to Immigrant Access to the Federal Food Stamp Program

Community Perspectives

Although there have been state and federal policy changes implemented to increase immigrant access to the Food Stamp Program, our research, demonstrates that significant barriers still exist, preventing eligible households from receiving food stamp benefits. These barriers include: a lack of awareness about the program, language inaccessibility, fears of “public charge” determinations and deportation, operation-based obstacles and misapplication of eligibility rules. Representative James Walsh (R-NY) recently hailed the potential of the Food Stamp Program and acknowledged the barriers that lower participation rates, especially among the children of immigrants:

The Food Stamp Program has long provided critical assistance to many families in need, especially to working poor families struggling to be self-sufficient... The [current] restrictions have deterred many legal immigrant families from seeking food stamps for their children even though these children are U.S. citizens and remain eligible for food stamp assistance. In recent years, food stamp participation by these [citizen] children in legal immigrant families has plunged by 75 percent. Fear and confusion prevent immigrant parents from applying for food stamp benefits on behalf of their children.⁴⁸

To assess the primary obstacles immigrant communities face when accessing food stamp benefits in New York City, we conducted interviews with 30 city-based organizations, including elected officials. Half of these organizations provide direct service to immigrant communities and the other half engage in policy analysis, research, and advocacy. These discussions informed our analysis and provided insight into the impact of food stamp policies on potential applicants.

Lack of Awareness and Outreach about the Federal Food Stamp Program

Many advocates stated that immigrants do not participate in the Food Stamp Program because they are often unaware of their eligibility. The 1996 legislation barring immigrants from the Food Stamp Program and the subsequent changes generated confusion around eligibility requirements among both clients and caseworkers. In some instances, clients screen themselves out of the process, while in other instances, caseworkers unjustifiably deny clients’ applications.

The United States Department of Agriculture has initiated national campaigns to increase overall participation in the Food Stamp Program, which have included distributing printed materials, creating public service announcements and advanced training courses at the state and community levels.⁴⁹ Such outreach campaigns are integral to raising awareness about the Food Stamp Program, yet advocates explain that materials addressing the complexity of eligibility rules and immigrant-specific concerns are not widely distributed, or are primarily available on the internet.⁵⁰ Low-income households may have limited access to the internet and community-based organizations generally cannot afford to mass-produce such materials.

In New York City, many community advocates highlight that a lack of awareness about the program is compounded by the rapid spread of misinformation. Advocates state that one applicant’s negative experience with New York’s Human Resources Administration office may affect the entire community’s perception of the Food Stamp Program. An advocate working with the Asian community in Manhattan emphasizes:

We are often trying to re-educate people about eligibility rules because so many people are convinced that one person’s bad experience of being denied will be their own, especially among the elderly immigrants we work with. We are often in the business of combating false rumors about law and government policy. This is because so many of our clients are incorrectly denied and other community members see this and assume they will never qualify.

Materials addressing issues of deportation, “public charge” determinations, and citizenship concerns are critical to increasing awareness and participation. A number of advocates emphasize that there is a general distrust of government systems and institutions in several of New York’s immigrant communities, sometimes due to harmful experiences with

governments in their countries of origin. We found that this distrust affects knowledge and even consideration of public benefit programs, including the FSP. This is especially true in populations of refugees and asylees. One advocate who works primarily with West African refugees and asylees in the South Bronx notes:

For many of my clients it is difficult to imagine that the government is there to provide an actual service, like provide them food, and because there are no materials printed in my clients' [native languages], it is difficult to convince them that they will not be negatively affected by applying for something like food stamps.

Our interviews highlight that more widely-distributed, immigrant-specific materials will likely enhance awareness and program participation.

Language Barriers

The majority of interviewed advocates state that language inaccessibility remains a major barrier for immigrants accessing food stamp benefits. The 2000 Census reports that over 300 different languages are spoken in the United States, and almost 18% of the population, or 47 million people, speak a language other than English at home.⁵¹ The National Conference of State Legislatures further observes that just over 4%, or an estimated 11 million individuals, indicate that they speak limited or no English.⁵² In New York City, this number increases dramatically — almost two thirds of immigrant adults (1.1 million) are limited English proficient (LEP).⁵³ LEP immigrants in New York City experience higher rates of poverty and food insecurity than U.S. citizens: 34% of LEP immigrants in NYC live below the federal poverty line, and a similar 36% of LEP immigrant families are food insecure. Among New York City families that speak no English, 57% are food insecure.⁵⁴

As part of the anti-discrimination provision included in the Federal Food Stamp Act, state agency workers must provide interpretation services as well as translated materials for their clients. Federal mandates require that state agencies must serve all LEP clients regardless of the size of the language group. They must also provide interpreters that are competent in English and the other language, sensitive to cultural differences and able to convey information accurately. Finally, the agencies must not solely rely on telephone interpreter services.⁵⁵

In New York City, advocates and officials have tried to decrease the inequities associated with these language differences. In 1999, the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and Make the Road by Walking, a community organization, filed a class action suit against the city, *Ramirez v. Giuliani*, after many non-English speakers reported that they did not have access to translated food stamp materials, were not provided a translator at food stamp offices and were told that interpreter services were not available or that they should bring their own interpreter.⁵⁶ After a settlement in 2002, both the City and state are now required to translate all of their documents into Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian, and to staff their offices with employees who speak the languages most widely spoken in the community the office serves. The City has also implemented a language hotline so that anyone who requests an interpreter is provided one.

Yet, not all of these mandates have been adequately implemented. One advocate working with elderly immigrants in Bushwick explains that many of her LEP clients are not offered or provided a translator, and if a translator is present in the office, s/he is often overbooked. When asked about the language hotline, the advocate reports that she has “never had a client use the translator telephone services in the entire two years [she has] been there.” She describes how most of her clients struggle through interviews with confusing exchanges and emphatic gesturing, which is frustrating for both the client and the caseworker.

One final consideration under language inaccessibility is the literacy rate among immigrant populations in New York City. In addition to many immigrants reporting limited English skills, some advocates observe that many also have limited literacy skills in their native languages. Currently, there is no protocol for HRA offices to deal with LEP, illiterate

applicants. One advocate highlights the impact of this for immigrant applicants:

Some of our clients are not literate at all and must sign their names with an ‘x.’ This is a problem because they do not know what they are signing and a worker cannot explain anything to [those who cannot read] as they might be able to with an English speaking person.

Although language accessibility has improved, the City’s adherence to court mandated requirements and the creation of protocols for special cases will enhance immigrants’ access to the Food Stamp Program.

Fear of Deportation

Our interviews combined with national surveys conducted by policy organizations such as the Urban Institute, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the National Immigration Law Center suggest that a primary reason immigrants do not access federal food stamp benefits is the persistent fear that it will affect their immigration status or affect their ability to stay in the United States.⁵⁷ A report by the Urban Institute suggests that, “many immigrants believe, for instance, that getting benefits might endanger their immigration status or prevent them from getting green cards, reentering the country, or becoming citizens. Further, many families are confused by the complex changes in immigration and welfare law that occurred in 1996, and may have believed that all immigrants were disqualified.”⁵⁸ In addition, the National Conference of State Legislatures argues that, “increased reporting requirements, which require a state agency to report to immigration authorities their knowledge of an immigrant that is unlawfully in the United States, cause immigrants to fear that use of public benefits will negatively affect their immigration status or that of a family member.”⁵⁹

In New York City, immigrant rights’ advocates repeatedly stress that immigrants fear that their immigration status will be adversely affected by receiving food stamps in two ways: 1) by having their status reported to federal immigration authorities, and 2) being deemed a “public charge.”

Reporting Status to Authorities

Until 1996, immigrant applicants were protected from the possibility of their immigration status being reported to federal immigration authorities by New York City’s Executive Order 124. The Order prohibited any city officer or employee from transmitting information on the immigration status of any individual to federal immigration authorities unless: 1) the agency was required by law, 2) the immigrant explicitly authorized the City to confirm his or her immigration status or 3) the individual was suspected to be involved in criminal activity. However, the validity of this order was put into question by the enactment of the 1996 PRWORA (Sections 411A and 434) and the Immigration Reform Act (IRA, Section 642). Both statutes mandate that state and local governments report information regarding an individual’s immigration status, “lawful or unlawful,” to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (now renamed the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE)). These measures also barred government entities from prohibiting voluntary disclosure to ICE.⁶⁰

In 1997, former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani challenged these provisions within PRWORA and IRA in a lawsuit, *New York City v. United States*, citing states’ rights as guaranteed by the 10th Amendment. He argued that programmatic operations and employee requirements fell under state jurisdiction and should not be regulated or controlled by federal statute.⁶¹ Giuliani attacked the federal regulations, claiming that the functional interpretation of these regulations was unnecessarily vague. Giuliani argued that the interpretation leaves states with no exact instruction on how to implement regulations and only adds to the vulnerability of immigrant populations. In a speech on the Welfare Reform Act, Giuliani commented on the consequences of these regulations and the fear they generated within immigrant communities:

So it seems to us that this is another ‘not-real’ attempt to control immigration... but rather it creates a sense of fear and disincentives because the reality is that all the names—if we’re required to turn them in—will just be added to a very big

pile. The overwhelming majority of people will face a type of Russian roulette where some will be deported and some won't. [Thus] you create this catastrophic setting but in no way are you affecting the number of people, at least the present population of...undocumented immigrants that are here.⁶²

The Second Circuit did not agree with the City's position that the federal provisions were unconstitutional. However, the court left open the possibility of restricting unauthorized communications between City employees and the immigration officials as long as the restricted information does not pertain only to immigration status. In response, Mayor Michael Bloomberg implemented Executive Order 41, commonly known as "don't ask, don't tell." Like Executive Order 124, it prohibits city agencies from asking for or disclosing an immigrant's citizenship status. But, unlike Executive Order 124, Order 41 makes confidential a larger class of information, including income tax records, sexual orientation, status as a victim of domestic violence and immigration status.⁶³ Advocates and community leaders now reference Executive Order 41 when trying to encourage immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, to apply for food stamps on behalf of their family members.

In addition to Executive Order 41, federal clarifications have been issued so that now only those immigrants who provide evidence of an outstanding "Order of Deportation" are eligible for removal. Furthermore, Social Service districts, including HRA, have been instructed to report the names of those eligible for removal to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), which in turn is responsible for giving the names to ICE. This means that HRA workers have neither the authority nor a requirement to contact immigration officials except to verify the authenticity of immigration documents provided by an immigrant applicant to prove eligibility. Despite these changes, the majority of advocates still report that clients fear that the receipt of food stamps will affect their immigration status and lead to deportation.

Fear of "Public Charge" Determinations

In addition to deportation fears, advocates state that immigrants' fear of being declared a "public charge" deters many potentially eligible individuals from accessing food stamp benefits. An immigrant declared to be a "public charge" within five years of entering the U.S. can be deported. The DOJ defines "public charge" as "an alien who has become, for deportation purposes, or who is likely to become, for admission/adjustment purposes, primarily dependent on the government for subsistence by receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance or institutionalization for long-term care at government expense"⁶⁴

In 1999, in an effort to dispel some of the myths surrounding the concept of "public charge" the Department of Justice (DOJ) and INS issued guidance in the federal register. The DOJ sought to "reduce the negative public health consequences generated by the existing confusion and to provide aliens with better guidance as to the types of public benefits that will and will not be considered by immigration officials for public charge purposes."⁶⁵

The issuance emphasizes that even accessing cash benefits does not automatically make an immigrant ineligible to become a permanent resident. Furthermore, the DOJ and INS clarified that an immigrant's participation in any programs other than cash assistance or institutional long term care under Medicaid, including nutrition programs such as Food Stamps, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, raise no "public charge" issues. Despite this reassurance, concerns and myths regarding "public charge" persist since these policies are complex and often inaccessible for clients, caseworkers, and advocates.

New York City advocates emphasize that most immigrants do not know that they may apply for benefits on behalf of eligible family members without disclosing their own immigration status or social security number. This is especially important for mixed status families, wherein undocumented adults have to apply on behalf of their eligible children.

Legal advocates suggest that, in reality, "public charge" concerns may only affect an immigrant's ability to stay in the

United States when an immigrant seeks adjustment of status to “lawful permanent residence” on the basis of a family petition. Some individuals have also reported difficulties entering the United States as a visitor if the border officials believe that they have used public benefits in the past, but reports about such difficulties have been infrequent. Although immigrants are rarely, if ever deported, persistent fear within New York City’s immigrant communities remains.

Discrimination and Fear of Government Agencies

Since 9/11, there has been a heightened fear of deportation and “public charge” determinations among all immigrant groups; however, our research demonstrates that Arab and South Asian communities in New York City encounter a disproportionate amount of discrimination and cultural bias. Although Pakistanis and Bangladeshis report some of the highest rates of poverty in New York City, one advocate working in both of these communities explains that these groups are hesitant to participate in the Food Stamp Program because of negative experiences at HRA offices. Another advocate from the Arab community reiterates that this discrimination is a real barrier for many immigrants:

This [fear] has increased for us since 9/11 as people have an even greater concern about participating in government programs and accessing services, even if they really need them...In particular, I have seen an increase fear from women who wear hijab [head scarf]; they refuse to go to the HRA office.

More research is needed to fully comprehend how pervasive this type of inequitable treatment is among immigrant applicants to the Food Stamp Program. It should be an immediate concern since this type of discrimination only exacerbates economic and health disparities.

Operational Barriers

At the national and state levels, operational barriers, such as the hours and locations of food stamp offices as well as the documentation requirements for the application process, affect participation rates among many low-income immigrant applicants.

Location-based Barriers

In New York City, the location and hours of food stamp offices prohibit many clients from completing the application process. In a recent report, the Urban Justice Center found that numerous clients in New York City, many of whom worked in low-wage, service-sector jobs, were not able to take time away from work to physically visit an office and apply for benefits. As noted, immigrants are overrepresented in these types of jobs. Therefore, working families in New York City were less likely to enroll in the Food Stamp Program, even after taking account of benefit levels, English language proficiency, household poverty status, and other factors.⁶⁶ To remedy this disadvantage faced by working families, HRA has opened extended hour offices in 5 of its 20 neighborhood centers. Interestingly, only four of these offices are advertised as “extended hour” locations on the NYC Human Resource Administration website.⁶⁷ During our interviews, advocates reiterate that because so few offices offer extended hours, clients crowd in after work and still do not always reach a caseworker.

Bureaucratic Inefficiencies

The time and lost income associated with the Food Stamp application process presents another barrier for immigrants. Immigrant workers are nearly twice as likely as native-born workers to hold low-wage jobs that provide little or no flexible time for employees to take personal leave.⁶⁸ In addition to the required visits for the initial application submission and the interview, clients are often required to visit food stamp offices multiple times, waiting many hours each visit in order to sort out agency errors. One advocate explains the effect that these inefficiencies have on the lives of his clients:

Many times people don’t even know who their case-workers are because clients get bounced between workers and centers. You have the right to apply in any office in the five boroughs. We encourage people to apply to the office closest to their home, but many times people who are living in Brooklyn get their cases transferred to Queens and Manhattan

because of case volume, but the clients are not notified of the change. I recently dealt with a [case in which a woman who lives in Brooklyn] had to go to HRA offices several times both in Queens and Brooklyn because people were telling her that her case was open in Queens, but she never received a letter in the mail. She eventually got a letter that she had stated her case was open in Queens but it was after the fact.

In addition to office visits, the length of the food stamp application itself can be a barrier for immigrants, especially those who are limited English proficient. Such language barriers prolong and complicate office visits. The Urban Institute notes: “[A]pplications for food stamps can be longer than applications for a driver’s license [and the] license to open a business... a lot of the rules, and a lot of the instructions are very confusing and difficult, even for people who speak English and read it at a high level. We have reason to believe that the application procedures may be more daunting for non-citizens than for citizens.”⁶⁹

Documentation Requirements

We found that the documentation requirements are often a major burden for immigrant applicants. For many immigrants living in illegal configurations, wherein three to four families share one apartment, obtaining rent receipts can be a major obstacle. Landlords are often unwilling to provide receipts since they can be penalized, and in some cases, landlords threaten to evict tenants who ask for such information. Similarly, employees working off the record experience difficulty obtaining income verifications from their employers.

In addition to the numerous documents required for the application process, New York State now mandates that applicants be finger-imaged. New York is one of four states that currently use this technology to prevent eligibility fraud.⁷⁰ The reliability of such technology in a social service application is uncertain, and still more questions arise regarding the increased stigma that the finger-imaging requirement adds to individuals applying for food stamps. It also introduces issues of privacy, unequal treatment of poor people, inconvenience, and fear of interagency sharing. For immigrant populations, this requirement can be a strong deterrent, regardless of citizenship status, even though OTDA has clarified that immigrants who cannot verify eligible immigration status should not be required to submit to finger imaging.

Misapplication of Immigration Rules and Documentation Requirements

In New York City, outreach workers highlight the difficulty of understanding and applying complex restrictions which leads to confusion among clients and workers, and in a number of cases, clients have been unduly denied access to the program. One legal advocate suggests it would take “one attorney to every six caseworkers to properly apply eligibility rules to eligible applicants.”

In response to concerns that mixed status households were not receiving entitlements, the Administration for Children and Families, the Health Care Financing Administration, the Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services and the Office for Civil Rights issued statements clarifying that state agencies must ensure that application forms promote enrollment of eligible families and eliminate the potential for discrimination based on national origin. In sum, states were encouraged to review and simplify the application process.

New York City has yet to take significant steps to simplify or streamline the food stamp application process for immigrant applicants. However, advocates are pushing for change. The Human Resources Administration is currently a defendant in a class action lawsuit filed by anti-poverty and domestic violence advocates on behalf of hundreds of battered immigrant women and children who are being denied food stamps and other aid due to programming errors in New York City welfare and benefits screening programs, faulty staff training, and systematic misapplication of eligibility rules. The number of plaintiffs involved in the pending case suggests that application problems are widespread and demand immediate attention.

Section V: Ways to Move Forward—Mobilizing National and New York City

Leaders to Improve Immigrant Access to the Food Stamp Program

Our research confirms that there are a significant number of New York City immigrants eligible for and not participating in the Food Stamp Program. Throughout this report, we have provided approximations of both the number and location of these eligible immigrants, and we have outlined the barriers that advocates identified as the leading obstacles for immigrants trying to access the FSP. Equipped with this information, we must move forward. In January 2006, FoodChange hosted its first “Immigrant Access to Food Stamps” forum, inviting advocates, policy-makers and government representatives to generate a list of ways to improve immigrant access to benefits. The following are outreach- and policy-based recommendations generated during FoodChange’s forum:

Policy-Based Recommendations

National

Eliminate all eligibility restrictions for immigrant applicants to the Food Stamp Program.

- Direct the national discussion on the Food Stamp Program towards the health and nutrition benefits of the program.
- Encourage the USDA to make one federal food stamp application available online. Ensure that these technological shifts do not detract from office-based operations and accessibility.
- Reduce unnecessary administration burdens from the food stamp application process. For example, implement models similar to those used after September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina to target immigrants eligible and not participating in NYC’s Food Stamp Program.

New York City

- New York City advocates should lead the charge for the 2007 Farm Bill debates in addressing the needs of immigrants by encouraging the federal government to eliminate federal eligibility restrictions currently in place for immigrant applicants.
- Adopt the lessons learned from the simplification and enrollment changes made to public health insurance programs in New York State, such as Medicaid and SCHIP.
- Update HRA’s technology. For example, ensure that all staff members have access to fax machines, Xerox machines, the internet, computers that can accept online applications and other appropriate technologies.
- Encourage HRA to implement a policy that makes any employee who does not comply with Executive Order 41 subject to termination.
- Ensure that a percentage of caseworkers in HRA offices speak the same language as the communities they serve.
- Provide additional and ongoing training on immigrant eligibility rules for HRA workers.
- Create a protocol for non-literate LEP immigrant clients, which should include training workers to be aware of literacy indicators in both English and native language.
- Ensure sufficient staffing at HRA offices to meet all federal program requirements.

Outreach-Based Recommendations

National

- Local agencies and social service organizations should partner with immigrant organizations located in areas with the highest number of eligible immigrants not participating in the Food Stamp Program to increase enrollment.
- HRA should increase extended hours and increase the number of offices that offer extended hours to its clients.
- HRA should create and post a client’s Bill of Rights prominently in the entryway of every Food Stamps/HRA office. It should include the right not to have information provided to immigration authorities without their permission.
- Put “I speak...” posters (large billboards with same sentence translated in 100 different languages) at the front desk or point of entry. These posters are used in City’s housing offices to help clients identify their native language and access interpretation services through the hotline.

- Use simple and clear language in food stamp outreach materials, especially when discussing “public charge” considerations and deportation concerns.
- The USDA should provide grants to community-based organizations that need resources to expand outreach tools and to train their workers on the specifics of immigrant eligibility for the Food Stamp Program.

New York City

- Immigration and anti-hunger groups should begin collaborating at NYC’s Food Stamp Task Force meetings.
- Create an advisory board with HRA in order to exchange information and strategize solutions on immigrant-related issues.
- Community organizations, like FoodChange, should use existing service networks to conduct outreach to immigrant communities. For example, these organizations could hold food stamp trainings for church leaders, doctors, teachers, union leaders, business owners, members of consulate offices, community organizers, social workers, etc., who could get information to those who need it most.
- Anti-hunger groups in New York City should work with immigration attorneys who are unfamiliar with food stamp rules to ensure that they provide clients with correct information about the food stamp program.

Although this report focuses on immigrants and food security in New York City, the issues discussed here are increasingly relevant to states and communities throughout the country. Approximately 12% of the national population is foreign-born, and one in five children is the child of an immigrant.⁷¹ While traditional receptor states such as California, Florida and New York still absorb the greatest number of immigrants, migration trends have been shifting over the past five years, with immigrants moving into nontraditional areas such as Iowa, Nevada, and Arkansas at high rates. The face of America is constantly changing, and it is vital that policy-makers and community leaders understand how legislation and program restrictions affect vulnerable populations of children and working families. We hope that this report will equip New York City leaders with a better awareness of immigrant access to Food Stamp benefits, but we also believe that the lessons learned can be used by community leaders and advocates to enhance policies that support citizen-children and immigrant families nationwide.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Federal Food Stamp Eligibility Before and After 2002 Farm Bill Restorations

Immigrant Category	Eligibility Before 2002 Farm Bill Reauthorization Act	Eligibility After 2002 Farm Bill Reauthorization Act
Qualified Permanent Resident: Children Who are Now Younger Than 18 Years of Age	Eligible if they were lawfully residing in the U.S. on August 22, 1996	Eligible Regardless of date of entry (This took Effect October 1, 2003)
Qualified Permanent Elderly Residents Born Before August 22, 1931 (71 years of age or older in 2002)	Eligible if they were lawfully residing in the U.S. on August 22, 1996	Eligible if: 1. They were lawfully residing in the U.S. on August 22, 1996, OR 2. If they have lived in the U.S. as a legal permanent resident for five years (Took Effect April 1, 2003)
Qualified Blind and/or Disabled Individuals Receiving Benefits or Assistance for their Condition	Eligible if they were lawfully residing in the U.S. on August 22, 1996	Eligible (Took Effect October 1, 2002)
Other Legal Permanent Residents	Eligible if they had worked forty qualifying quarters or had inherited forty quarters of work from a spouse	Eligible if: 1. They have lived in the U.S. as a qualified immigrant for five years 2. They have worked forty qualifying quarters or inherited forty quarters of work from a parent or a spouse
Special Immigrant Categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylees • Refugees • Cuban or Haitian Entrants • Amerasians • Individuals Granted Withholding of Deportation 	Eligible but only for seven years from the date of the asylum, refugee or other status granted by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Eligible without limit if they have lived in the United States as a legal permanent resident for five years (Took Effect on April 1, 2003).
Additional Special Categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hmong or Highland Laotian Tribe Members when the Tribe Rendered Assistance to US Personnel by Taking Part in a Military Rescue Operation • Canadian-Born American Indians • Individuals with US military connections 	Eligible	Eligible

Appendix II: Methodological Appendix for Estimates of New York City's Foreign Born Non-Citizens Eligible and not Participating in the Federal Food Stamp Program

This appendix summarizes the methodology FoodChange used to derive estimates of Food Stamp eligibility and participation among foreign-born non-citizens in New York City.¹ Because of data limitations and the complexities of food stamp eligibility rules, FoodChange's estimates should be considered descriptive rather than comprehensive. We offer these numbers to highlight the extent to which Legal Permanent residents and other foreign-born non-citizens, such as refugees and asylees, although eligible, do not participate in the Food Stamp Program. From these numbers, we also approximate the fiscal loss to New York City due to non-participation. This is the first time FoodChange has tried to derive data related to the eligible and non-participating foreign-born. It is our hope that this preliminary analysis will catalyze others to build on this information and methodology in increasing the participation rates of the eligible foreign-born.

The formula presented below is a combination of methodology created by FoodChange using a methodology introduced in the Food Research Action Center's paper, "Food Stamp Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot," data from New York's Human Resource Administration, and population data from New York's Department of City Planning.² FoodChange obtained Food Stamp participation data through a Freedom of Information Request from NYC's Department of Human Resource Administration. Because the basis of our immigrant eligibility analysis is the 2000 census and our Food Stamp household data is from 2002, the Census data have been adjusted to 2002 levels.

Below each methodological step is a list of the data's limitations and assumptions. The census data we used can be accessed at the external link below:

2000 Census SF-3

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/CTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&lang=en&ts=139938321645

We also accessed the American Community Survey Multi-Year Profile (2000-2002) to determine the borough growth rates between 2000 and 2002. This information can be accessed at the following link:

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/MYPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US3651000&-qr_name=ACS_2002_EST_G00_MYP21_1&-all_geo_types=N&-context=myp&-ds_name=ACS_2002_EST_G00_&-tree_id=302&-redoLog=false&-format=

Step 1: Determine the number of people who are income-eligible

In order to estimate food stamp eligibility and underutilization for foreign-born non-citizens in NYC, we first determined the total number of people living under 130 % of poverty in each New York City zip code, thereby meeting the income test for food stamp eligibility. We found this information from the 2000 Census, which reports the total number of people living below 130% of the poverty line, and we adjusted this data to 2002 by multiplying each zip code by its borough growth rate. The specific procedure for this step is written below.

- 1.1 Obtain the number of people living in each zip code below 130% of the national Federal Poverty Level from Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT 50.
- 1.2 Adjust income data to 2002 values by multiplying step 1.1 by the borough growth rate for each zip code. To obtain the borough growth rate, gather total population data for each borough from the 2002 American Community Survey Multi-Year Profile. Divide the 2002 total borough population number by 2000 total borough population number; this

¹ Any errors in calculation or method are the ultimate responsibility of Elizabeth McCarthy and Almas Sayeed, 2005 Congressional Hunger Fellows at FoodChange.

² Published September 28, 2005 (available at <http://www.frac.org/pdf/cities2005.pdf>)

gives you the borough growth rate. Then multiply the population below 130% of poverty in all of the zip codes in each particular borough by its respective growth rate.

Limitations:

- Adjusting 2000 Census data to 2002 levels introduces some error since it holds poverty constant over those three years. The Census reports that in reality the poverty rate increased from 11.3% to 12.1% in 2002. Our numbers do not capture this increase in the number of people eligible for food stamps in 2002 due to the rise in poverty.³
- Some people, including senior citizens and other categorically eligible groups, are eligible for food stamps at thresholds higher than 130% of poverty. By not including these populations, our numbers reduce the estimated number of eligible people.

Step 2: Determine those who are eligible by income and immigration status

From Step 1, we determined the number of people who are income eligible; however, this estimate did not account for the people who are ineligible because of their immigration status and resource level. Step 2 approximates the number of people who are eligible based on their immigration status.

- 2.1 For each zip code, obtain the number of foreign-born non-citizens who arrived in the U.S. from 1990 to 2000. This information can be found at Census 2000 SF-3 Table P23. Divide this number by 10 to obtain the constant rate of entry for foreign-born non-citizens over a ten-year period.
- 2.2 Multiply the product of Step 2.1 by 5 to determine the total number of foreign-born non-citizens who are ineligible for food stamps because of the five-year residency requirements currently placed on legal permanent residents.
- 2.3 will allow us to obtain the percentage of foreign-born non-citizens who are below 100% of the FPL in 2002. Adjust the number of foreign-born non-citizens below 100% of the FPL, found in Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT51, as well as the total number of foreign-born in each zip code to 2002 levels by multiplying each zip code by its borough growth rate. Then, divide the number of foreign-born non-citizens below 100% of the FPL by the total number of foreign-born non-citizens in each zip code. This gives you the rate of poverty among the foreign-born non-citizen population. Data on non-citizens below 130% of the FPL are not available, so Step 2.5 corrects for this.
- 2.4 Obtain the number of people living below 100% of the FPL from the Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50. Adjust to 2002 by multiplying each zip code value by its borough growth rate. Then create a ratio of the number of people living below 130% of FPL to the number of people living below 100% of FPL.
- 2.5 Multiply the result of Step 2.2 by the result of Step 2.3 and then by the result of Step 2.4. This is an estimate of the number of people below 130% of the FPL who have been LPRs for less than 5 years and are therefore ineligible.
- 2.6 Subtract the result of Step 2.5 from the result of Step 1.2. This is an estimate of how many people are eligible according to income and immigration status.

Limitations:

- When adjusting 2000 Census data to 2002, we assume that there is a constant rate of entry for non-citizens. This introduces some error into our estimates since rate of entry might have varied over individual years. In addition, some error is assumed by holding rates of immigration to NYC constant between 1990 and 2000.
- Steps 2.3-2.6 introduce the possibility for error since poverty rates are not consistent across population groups and over time.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. "Poverty in the U.S. 2002." *Current Population Reports*. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p60-222.pdf>. See also: "Poverty in the U.S. 2000." *Current Population Reports*. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p60-214.pdf>

- This formula does not fully account for immigrants who are eligible for Food Stamps regardless of date of entry; these groups include refugees, asylees, or children under 18. However, we argue that the over-counting of undocumented people in the Census data (the Census does not ask about documentation status in its surveys) balances the underestimation of non-citizen children, immigrant domestic violence survivors, refugees, and asylees.

Step 3: Determine Number of eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources

Households are only eligible if they have less than \$2,000 in countable resources (or \$3000 if at least one of the people in the household is age 60 years or older or disabled). In 2003, the Community Service Society estimated that only 9% of NYC residents under 200% of the FPL had resources above \$2500, making them resource ineligible. Using this evidence, the Urban Justice Center released a report in 2005 stating that in NYC roughly 10% of individuals below 130% of the FPL were ineligible because of the resource cap.⁴ In this report, we use the 10 % estimate because it captures the local dynamics of New York City's economy.

3.1 Multiply the result of Step 2.6 by 0.90. This approximates the number of people who are eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources.

Limitations:

- The Food Research and Action Center released a report in September 2005 estimating that 24.5% of people, who would otherwise be eligible for food stamps, are ineligible due to resources.⁵ This is a competing rate of non-eligibility due to resources and could be considered when deriving estimates of individuals eligible and not participating. We use 10% for the reasons outlined above.

Step 4: Determine number of Legal Permanent Residents who are eligible and not participating

4.1 Subtract the number of people participating in the Federal Food Stamp program (data acquired from NYC HRA) from the total number of people eligible (the result of step 3.1). This will give you the total number of people eligible but not participating.

4.2 Multiply the result of step 4.1 by the percent of people under 130% of the FPL who are foreign-born non-citizens for each zip code. This analysis provides an estimate of the number of eligible foreign-born non-citizens not participating in the Food Stamp Program.

Limitations:

- We assume that the proportion of people under 130% of the Federal Poverty Line who are foreign-born non-citizens is the same as the proportion of foreign-born non-citizens eligible for the FSP.
- The limitations presented in Steps one to three apply to Step 4.

⁴ Widom, Ewart, Arvizu Martinez, 2006: 15. James DeFillipis from Community Service Society (Personal Communication with UJC, March 7, 2005).

⁵ Shawn Powers, Ellen Vollinger, and Randy Rosso, "Food Stamp Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot," (Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Council, 2005) 29.

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