
**Changes in the Food and Nutrition Services Caseload in
North Carolina: November 2008**

by

Dean F. Duncan, III

Jordan Institute for Families
UNC-CH School of Social Work
Chapel Hill, NC
January 2009

Changes in the Food and Nutrition Services Caseload in North Carolina: November 2008

This report explores changes in the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) caseload in North Carolina in November 2008. This analysis is based on data extracted from the Food Stamp Information System (FSIS). These extracts are used to construct and maintain a longitudinal file that tracks the experiences of those individuals who have participated in the FNS program in North Carolina. The analysis explores changes in the number of households participating in the program, changes in the number of case openings, information on households who are participating in the program for the first time, and changes in the number of households participating in the program in each county across the state.

The analysis uses extracts made from FSIS in early January 2009. While information is available on households participating in the program in December 2008, it does not provide a complete assessment of all households that will receive benefits in December. There are a number of households that applied for benefits in December and whose applications are still pending when the extracts were made. Information on these households will be included in subsequent reports on the FNS caseload.

Figure One illustrates the changes in the FNS caseload over time. As the figure indicates, the number of households participating in the program grew by more than 69,000 between July 2007 and November 2008. In July 2007, 400,031 households participated in the program. By September 2007, the number of households had grown by more than 7,000 to 407,038. By July 2008, the number of households grew to 435,967. Two months later, the number of households participating in the FNS program in North Carolina had grown by almost 15,000 households to 450,577. The caseload grew by close to 10,000 households in October to 460,019. In November, the caseload again increased by close to 10,000 to 469,803 households.

The percentage increase in the number of households participating in the FNS program from August 2007 through November 2008 is shown in Figure Two. As the figure indicates, from September 2007 through June 2008, the rate of increase in the number of households participating in the FNS program appears to average around 0.5% each month. In February 2008, the rate of increase fell to near zero. This corresponds to the nearly flat line segment shown in Figure One for the period between January 2008 and February 2008. In July 2008, the rate of

increase grew to 1.58 %. From July 2008 through August 2008, the FNS caseload grew by 1.93%. The rate of increase fell slightly to 1.40% by September 2008. Since September, the percentage increase has exceeded 2% each month. In October, the percentage increase was 2.10%. In November, the percentage increase was 2.13%. This suggests that the caseload grew at a higher rate in October and November than in earlier months. The percentage increase in October and November is at least twice that for any month between September 2007 and May 2008.

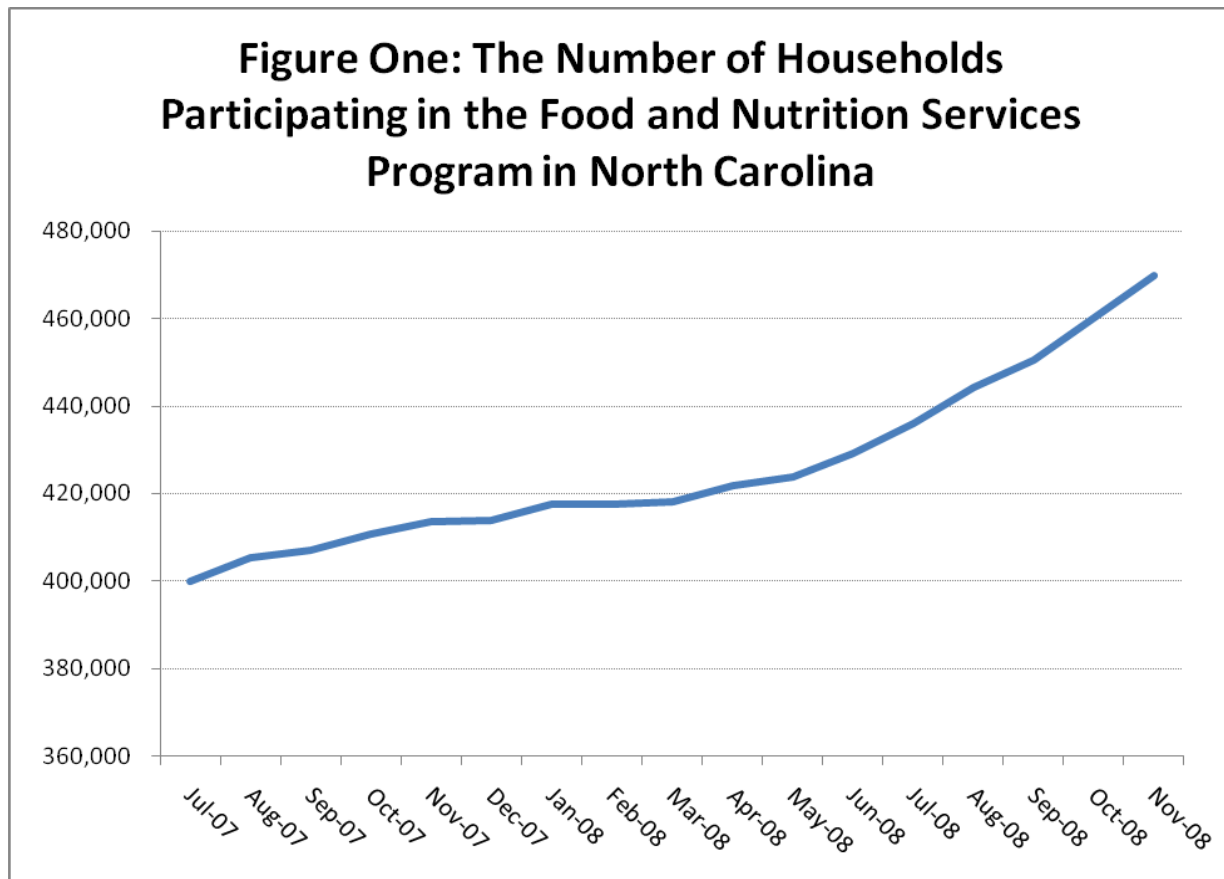


Figure Three tracks the number of cases opening in the FNS program between August 2007 and November 2008. As the figure indicates, the number of openings generally ranged between 20,000 and 25,000 per month between August 2007 and June 2008. In July 2008, the number of openings grew to 27,958. The number of openings increased to 28,743 in August 2008 before falling to 26,911 in September 2008. In both October and November 2008, the number of case openings exceeded 30,000 per month. In October, there were 31,799 case

Figure Two: The Percentage Increase In the Number of Households in the Food and Nutrition Services Program in North Carolina

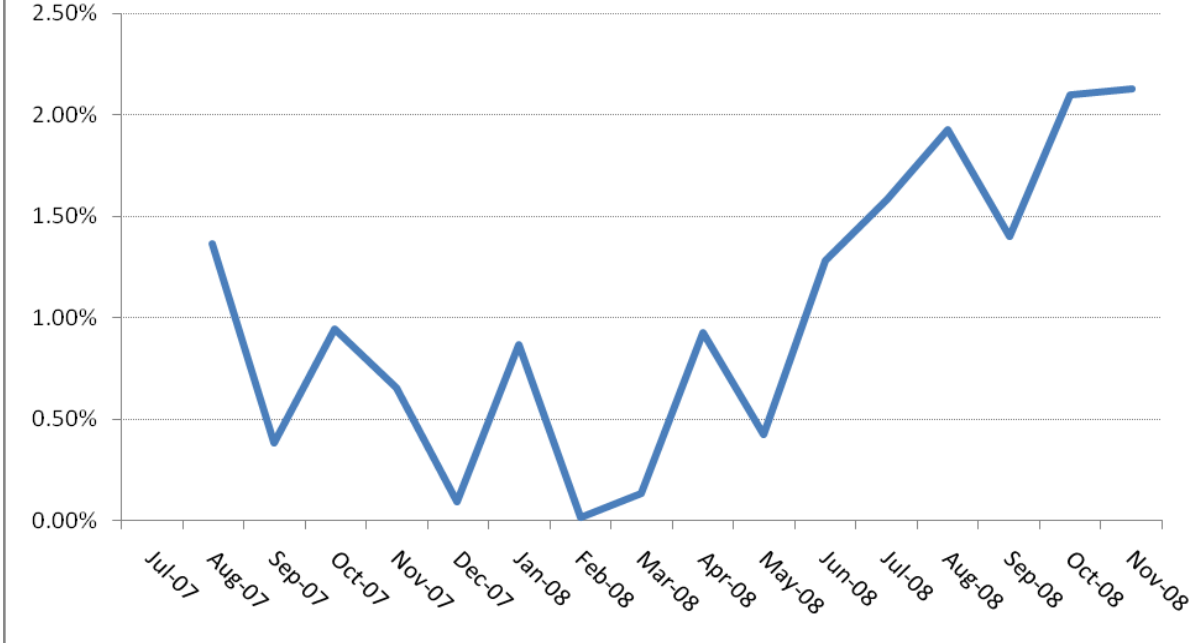
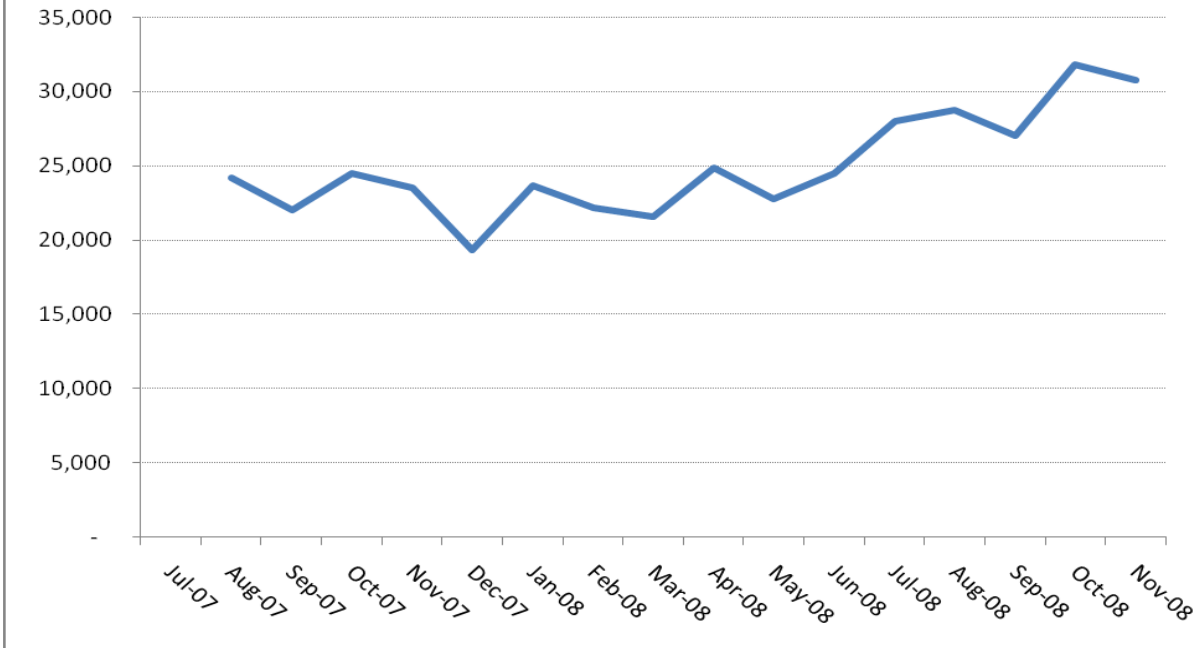
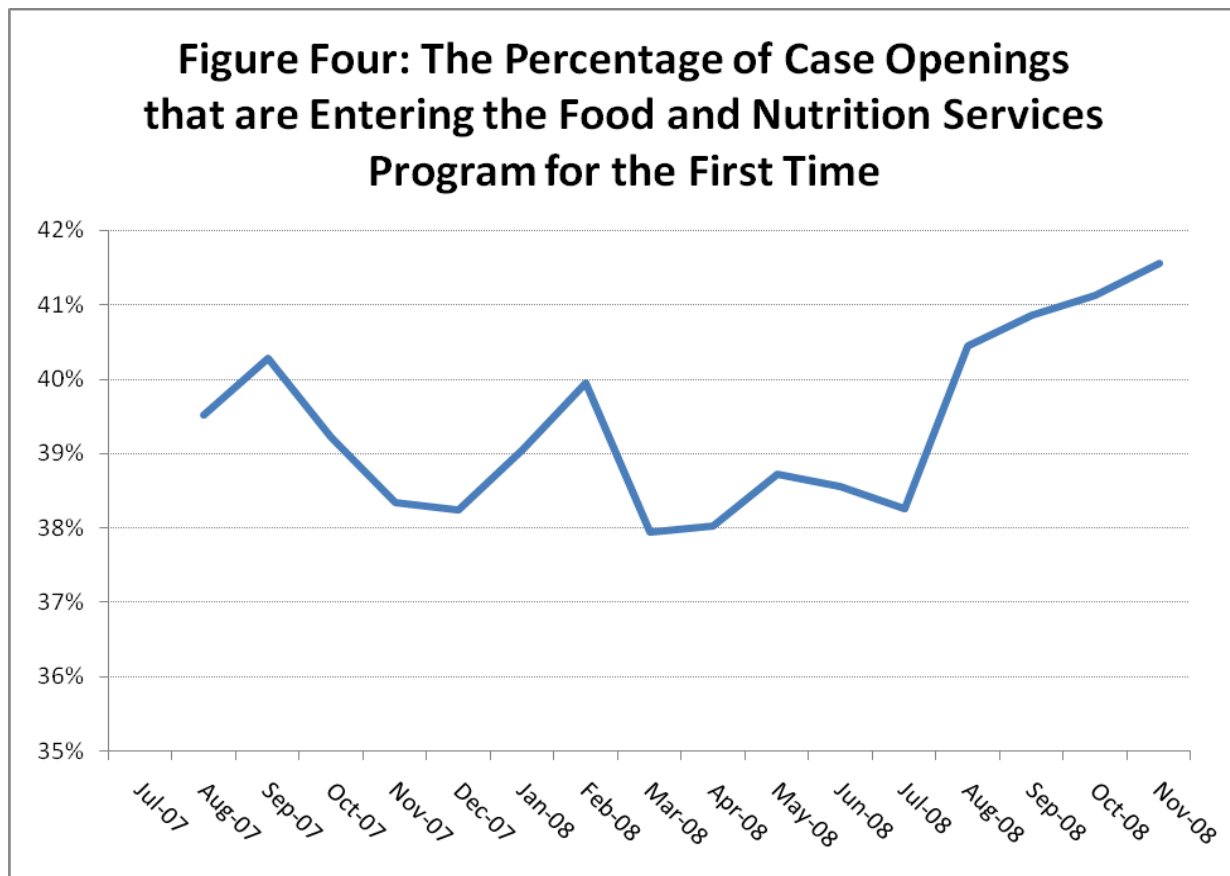


Figure Three: The Number of Case Openings in the Food and Nutrition Services Program



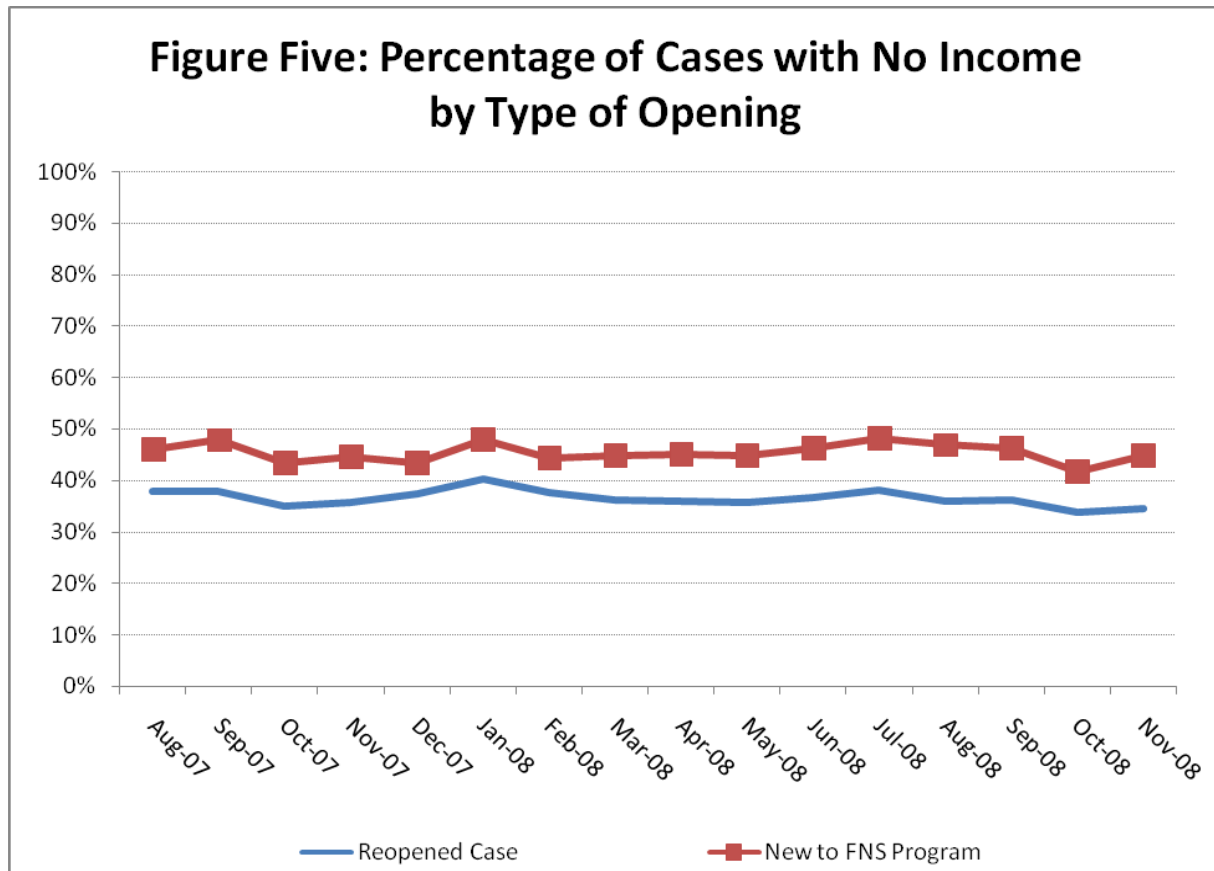
openings. The number of openings fell by about 1,000 in November 2008 to 30,742.

Case openings are an important tool in understanding changes in the size of the caseload. The caseload in any given month is equal to the caseload from the prior month minus the number of cases that closed plus the number of cases that were opened. Case openings can be divided into cases for families who are new to the program and those who had left the program in an earlier month and who are now returning to the program. Figure Four illustrates the percentage of case openings associated with cases that are new to the program. As the figure indicates, the percentage of cases that are new to the FNS program in North Carolina generally ranged between 38% and 40% between August 2007 and August 2008. In September 2008, the percentage rose to 41% in September 2008. It remained at that level in October 2008 and rose to 42% in November 2008. While these changes are relatively small, they suggest that there was a change in the composition of households coming onto the FNS program in September 2008. Even



though this change is slight, it does indicate that a large percentage of the households coming onto the program have never received FNS benefits before. One reason for this may be the downturn in the economy. Families who have never received FNS benefits before are now participating in the program.

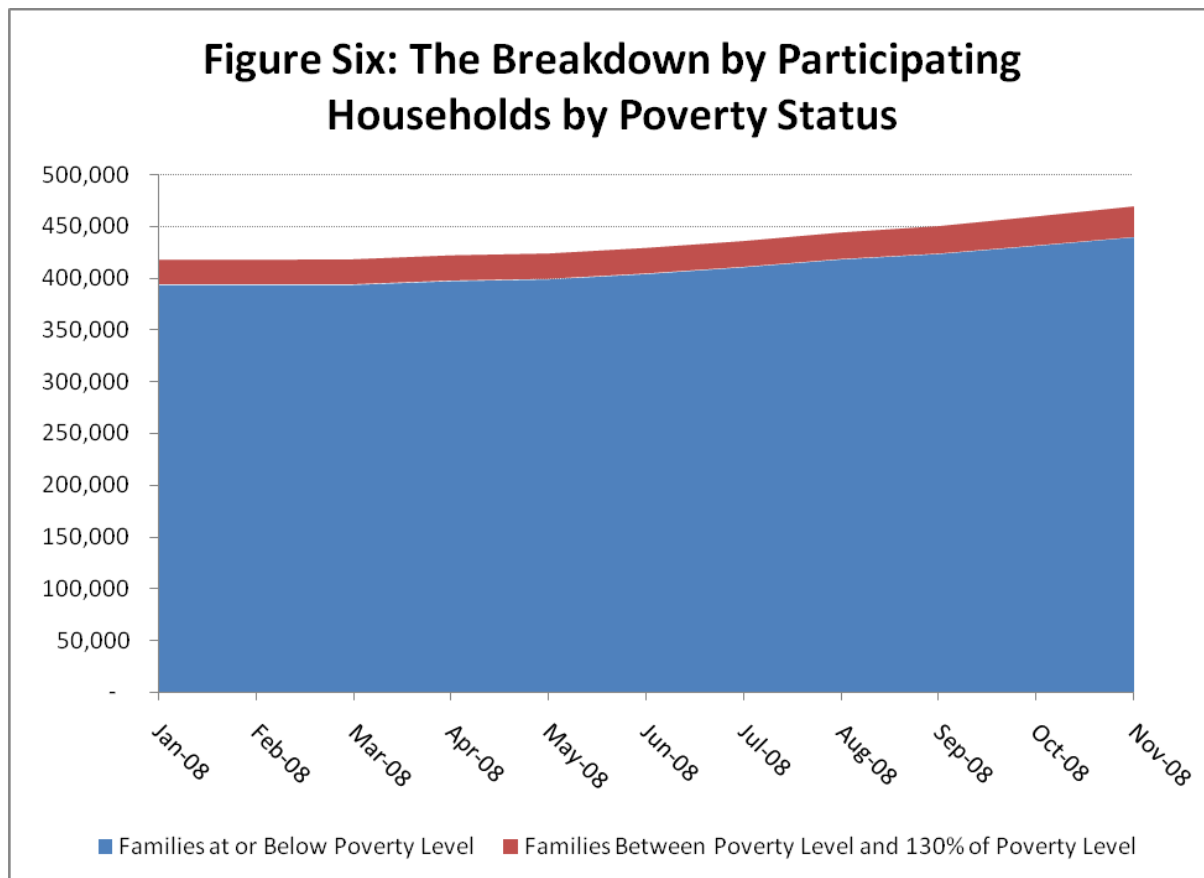
Figure Five illustrates the percentage of cases opened each month that have no income. These percentages are broken down by whether the case is being reopened or whether the case is new to the system. As the figure indicates, around 35% to 40% of the cases reopened each month report no income. A higher percentage of the cases for households that are new to the FNS program—ranging from 44% to 48%--have no income. Over time, the percentage of households that are new to the program that report no income is about 10% higher than households who are



reopening their cases. The figure indicates that the percentage of cases with no income—based on type of opening—varies from month to month but that there are no pronounced trends up or down suggesting the proportion of cases with no income is changing in a particular direction as a

result of the economic slowdown. Even though there has been an increase in the number of case openings and, as Figure Four reports, the percentage of those openings associated with households who have never received FNS benefits before, the percentage of these households who report no income has been fairly steady. In September 2008, 46% of these households who are new to the program reported no income. In November 2008, 45% of the households who are new to the program reported no income. Among the households who reopened their cases in September, 36% reported no income, while 35% of the households who reopened their FNS case in November reported no income.

There are a number of requirements that households have to meet in order to participate in the FNS program. These include citizenship, having limited resources, and compliance with work registration requirements. Certain felons are ineligible. Some students who are over 18-years-old may be ineligible as well, along with individuals who do not provide or refuse to provide their Social Security Number. Households that meet these requirements and have income at or below 130% of the federal poverty level may be eligible for benefits. Figure Six illustrates



the breakdown of households participating in the program from January through November 2008 by whether their income is at or below the federal poverty level or whether their income is between the poverty level and 130% of the federal poverty level. As the figure indicates, even though the number of households participating in the program has increased, the percentage whose income is between the poverty level and 130% of the poverty level has remained stable over time at about 6%. This suggests that even though more households are receiving benefits, the two groups of households—based on whether their income is below or above the poverty level—have increased at the same rate.

Figure Seven indicates the change in the size of the FNS program caseload between November 2007 and November 2008. As the figure indicates, all 100 counties had an increase in the number of households receiving benefits. Two counties had increases of less than 5%. According to the figure, 25 counties had an increase of 5% to 10%. Another 25 counties had increases of 10% to 15%. Almost one-third of the counties—31—had increases of 15% to 20% while 12 counties had increases of 20% to 25%. Five counties—Lee, Cherokee, Dare, Macon, and Clay—had an increase in the size of their caseload of more than 25%. Three of these counties are located in the western corner of the state while a fourth is located on the coast. The caseloads in Lee and Cherokee counties grew by slightly more than 25%. The caseloads in Dare and Macon counties grew by more than 28% during the twelve-month period, while the caseload in Clay grew by 31%. Jones County had the lowest caseload growth at 2.1%. The caseload in Bladen County grew by 4.5%.

The change in the size of the caseload between October 2008 and November 2008 is illustrated in Figure Eight. As the figure reports, all counties had an increase in the size of their caseload. Twelve counties had increases of between 0 to 1% while 27 counties increased the size of their FNS caseload by 1% to 2%. Thirty-one counties had an increase between October and November of 2% to 3%, while thirty counties had an increase of more than 3%. Northampton County had the smallest percentage increase at 0.4%. The FNS caseload in Anson, Pitt, Camden, and Orange counties increased by 0.7%. The five counties with the largest percentage increase are Clay, Jackson, and Carteret counties, whose caseload increased by 5%, Currituck, whose caseload increased by 6%, and Dare, which had a caseload increase of 11%.

Figure Seven: Percentage Change in the Number of FNS Program Cases between November 2007 and November 2008

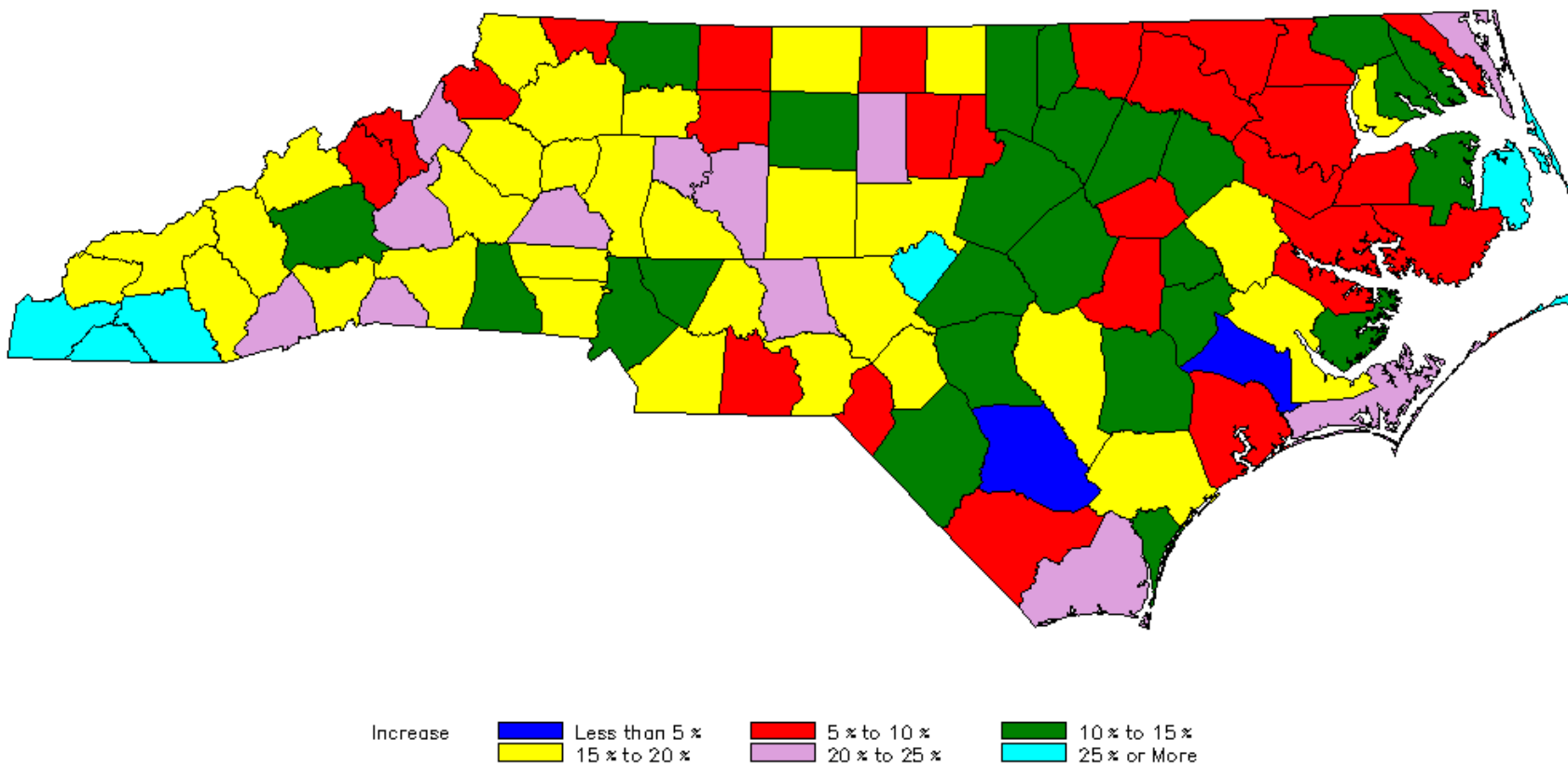
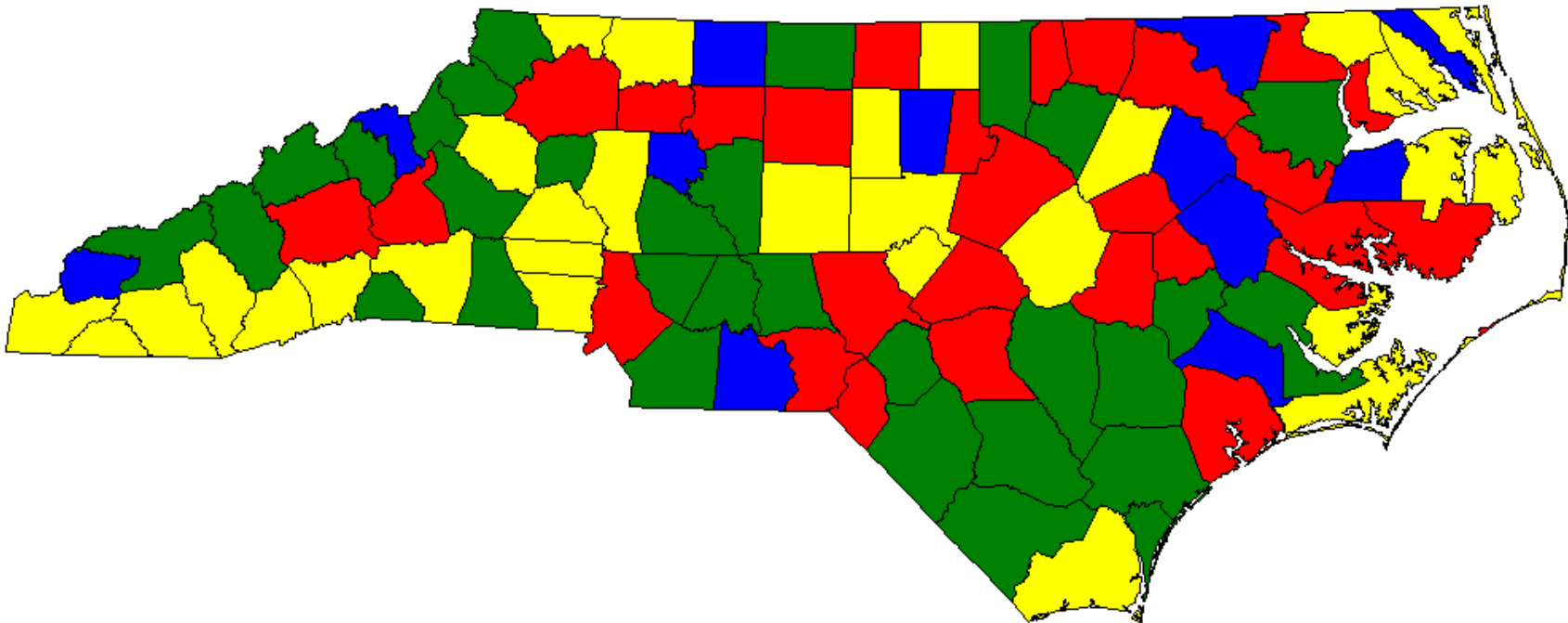


Figure Eight: Percentage Change in the Number of FNS Program Cases between October 2008 and November 2008



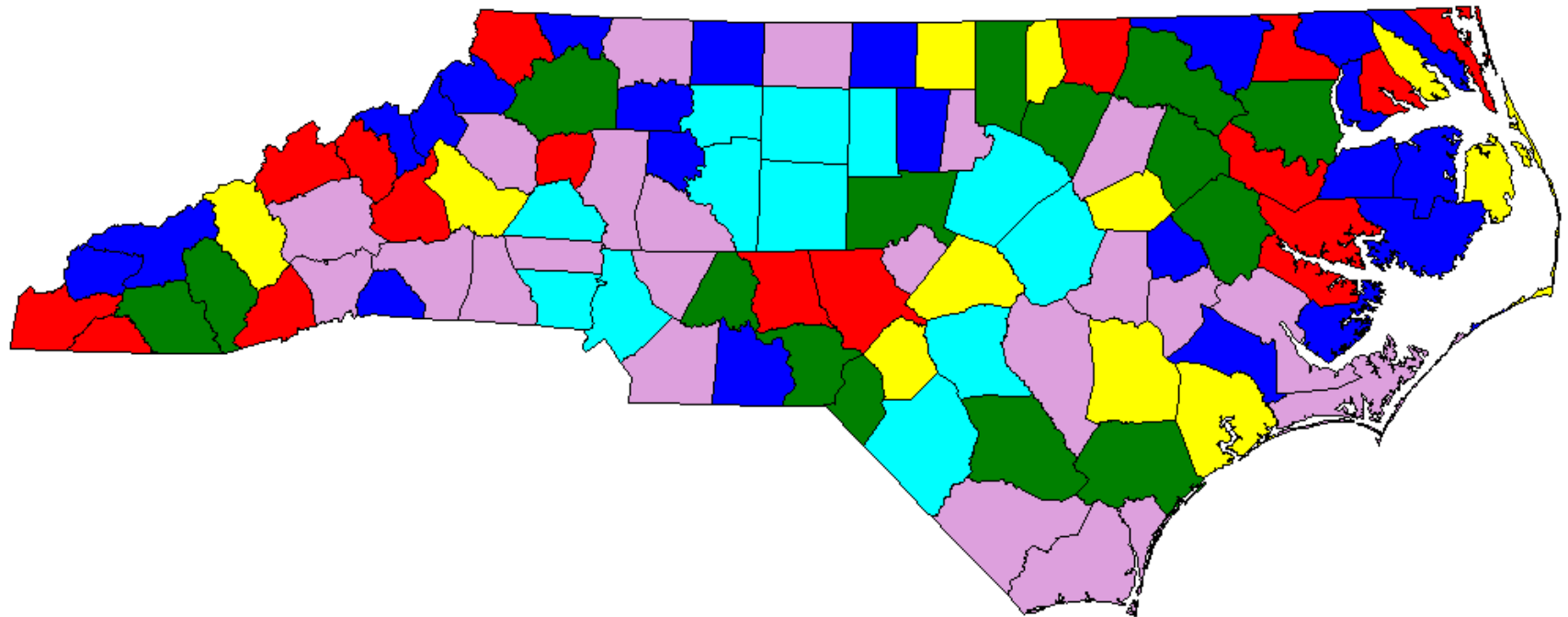
Change ■ Increase of 0 % to 1 % ■ Increase of 1 % to 2 %
 ■ Increase of 2 % to 3 % ■ Increase of More than 3 %

Tracking only the percentage change can be misleading. For example, even though the percentage increase in Pitt County was 0.7% between October and November 2008, the FNS caseload increased by 65 cases. By the same token, the 30 additional households in Clay County added to the program between October and November boosted the county's caseload by 5%. Figure Nine shows the increase in the number of households in each county between October and November 2008. According to the figure, 23 counties had an increase of between 0 and 25 households, while 16 counties had an increase of between 25 and 50 households. Fifteen counties increased their FNS caseload by 50 to 75 households while 11 increased by 75 to 100 households. Almost one out of four counties—23—increased their caseload by 100 to 200 households, and a dozen counties increased their caseload by 200 or more households.

The counties with the smallest number of households added to their caseload are Camden, which increased its caseload by two, Graham, which increased by four, Jones, which increased its caseload by six, and Mitchell and Hyde, where the caseloads increased by eight households between October and November. Wake County, whose caseload increased by 1.4%, added 294 households. Guilford County, which also had an increase of 1.4%, added 360 households. Cumberland County added 364 households and Gaston County, which had a 4% increase in its caseload, added 449 households. Mecklenburg, where the caseload grew by 1.4%, added 569 households.

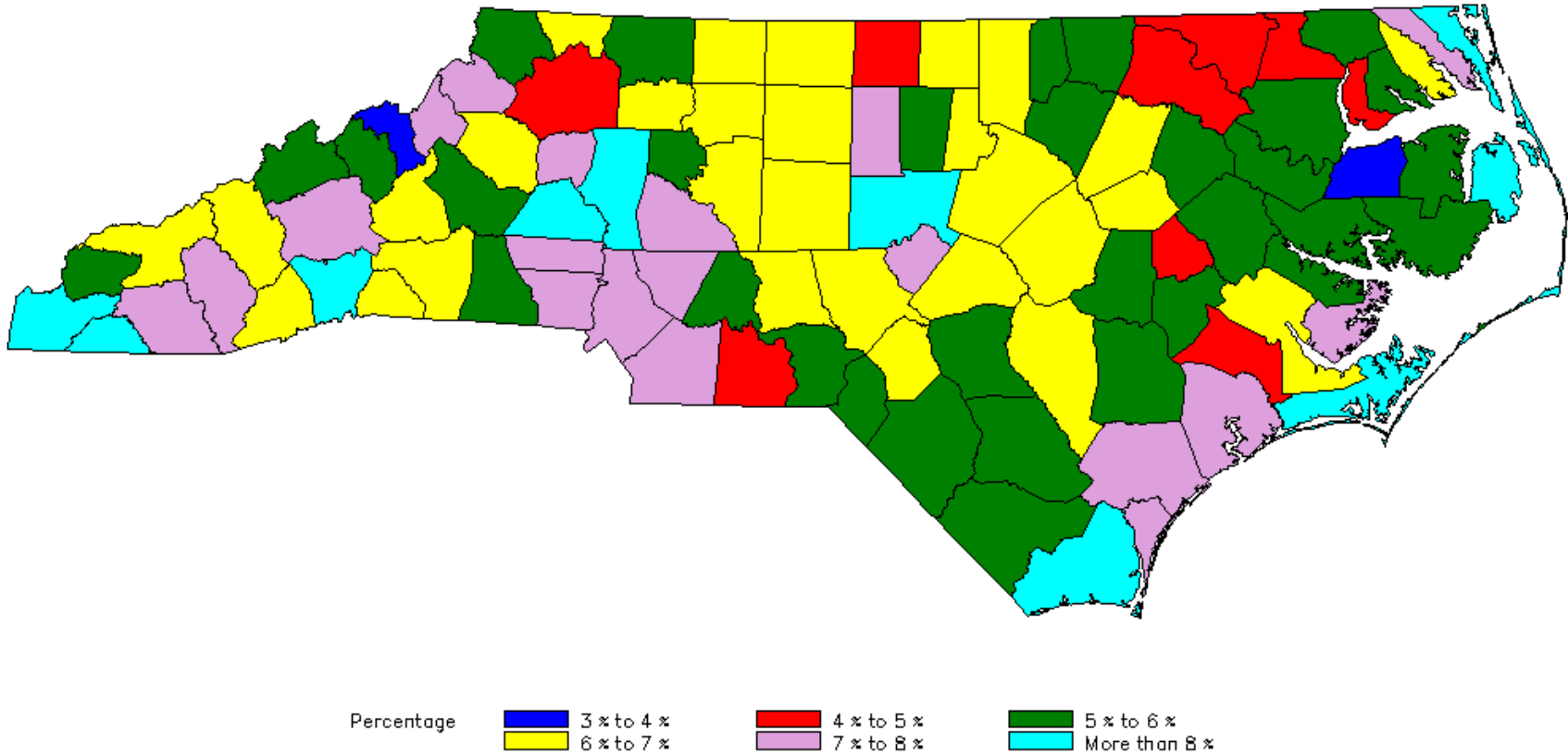
One way of tracking caseload changes is to explore the percentage of cases that are new to the program or reopened each month. New cases represent households that have never received FNS benefits before. Reopened cases track households that have participated in the program before but left for one or more months before returning to apply for benefits again. Figure Ten reports the percentage of each county's caseload that is associated with new or reopened cases. This percentage is calculated by dividing the number of new or reopened cases by the number of households receiving benefits. The figure indicates that there were two counties where new or reopened cases accounted for 3% to 4% of the caseload, nine where new or reopened cases accounted for 4% to 5%, and 31 counties where new or reopened cases accounted for 5% to 6% of the caseload in November 2008. There were 29 cases where new or reopened cases represented 6% to 7% of the caseload, 19 where they accounted for 7% to 8% of

Figure Nine: Changes in the Number of Households in the FNS Program between October 2008 and November 2008



Change	Increase of 0 to 25 Households	Increase of 25 to 50 Households	Increase of 50 to 75 Households
	Increase of 75 to 100 Households	Increase of 100 to 200 Household	Increase of 200 or More Househol

Figure Ten: Percentage of the FNS Caseload Opened in November 2008



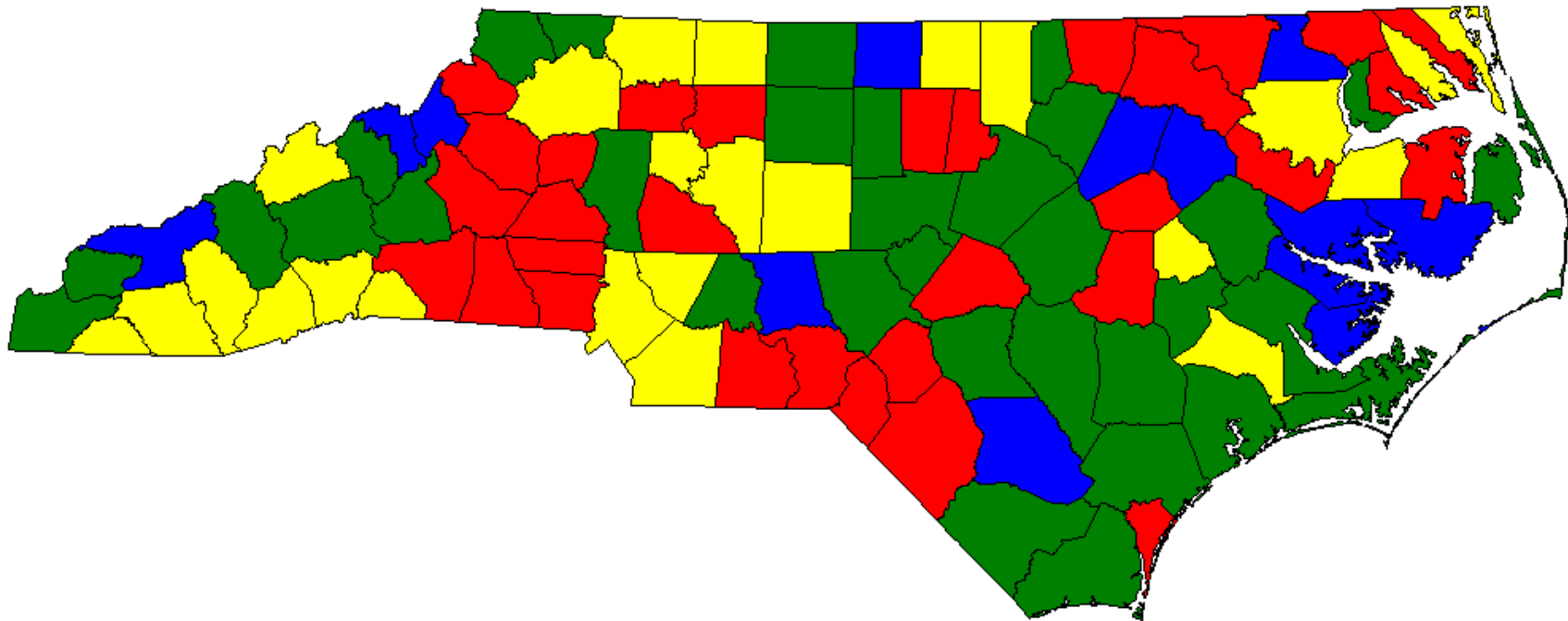
the caseload, and ten where new or reopened cases accounted for more than 8% of the caseload. The five counties where new or reopened cases accounted for the smallest percentage of the caseload are Washington at 3.6%, Mitchell at 3.7%, Northampton at 4%, Halifax at 4.2%, and Caswell at 4.3%. In Chatham County, new or reopened cases accounted for 8.4% of the November 2008 caseload, while they accounted for 8.8% of the caseload in Brunswick County. In Carteret County, the 254 new or reopened cases accounted for 9.3% of the households participating. New or reopened cases represented 10.2% of the caseload in Currituck County and 14.9% of the caseload in Dare County.

The percentage of new cases among the new or reopened cases is shown in Figure Eleven. This percentage was calculated by dividing the number of cases that are new to the FNS program by the number of new or reopened cases in the November 2008 caseload. The higher the percentage of new cases among case openings, the more the increase in the caseload is due to new households entering the program. In some respects, the increase in the number of new households entering the program is an indicator of how the downturn in the economy may be affecting the county's population. As the economy gets worse, more and more families who have never participated in the program before may be applying for FNS benefits. As the figure indicates, there were a dozen counties where the percentage of new cases represented less than 35% of the November case openings. There are 31 counties where the percentage of new cases ranged between 35% to 40%, while in one-third of the counties (33), new cases accounted for between 40% and 45% of the case openings. There were 24 counties where new cases represented more than 45% of the case openings. The counties where new cases account for the lowest percentage of case openings are Hyde (20%), Bladen (29%), Pamlico (29%), Avery (31%), and Mitchell (31%). The counties where the percentage of new cases among case openings is the highest are Polk (49%), Currituck (51%), Jackson (56%), Davie (58%), and Clay (71%).

Summary

The analysis of participation in the FNS program in North Carolina shows that the number of households has grown over the last year. In November 2007, there were 413,548 households participating in the program. By November 2008, the number of households had

Figure Eleven: Percentage of Opened Cases That Are New to The Program in November 2008



Percentage ■ Less than 35 % ■ 35 % to 40 % ■ 40 % to 45 % ■ More than 45 %

grown to 469,803. The increase has not been steady. From September 2007 through June 2008, the rate of increase in the number of households ranged around 0.5% per month. In July 2008, the rate of increase jumped to 1.58%, and rose to 1.93% in August 2008. The percentage increased to 2.10% in October and 2.13% in November. The number of case openings also remained fairly steady between September 2007 and June 2008, generally ranging between 20,000 and 25,000 per month. In July 2008, the number of openings increased to almost 28,000 households. There were an additional 28,743 openings in August 2008. By October, the number of case openings increased to 31,799. The number fell slightly—to 30,742—in November 2008. From August 2007 through August 2008, between 38% and 40% of those openings represent households that are new to the system. In September, the percentage increased to 41%, where it remained in October. In November, the percentage increased to 42%. This is an indication of the number of new households who are receiving FNS benefits for the first time.

Between November 2007 and November 2008, one quarter of the counties in the state saw an increase in their caseload of 10% to 15%. More than three out of ten had an increase of 15% to 20%. A dozen had an increase of 20% to 25%, while five had an increase of 25% or higher.