

## **Research Issues Relating to Food and Eating Consequences of Time Use Decisions**

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We have talked about a number of possible research topics related to the food and eating consequences of time use decisions by consumers. While I have not carefully catalogued who suggested the topic or whether it came from our discussions, these topics have been addressed during the conference.

It was suggested that the current cut off for participant response in the American Time Use Survey, 15 years of age, may be too high. What differences exist in behavior across age ranges and how reliable would data gathered from people younger than 15 years of age be?

There was discussion about the reliability of the information being gathered through the ATUS in representing behavior of the general population. Concerns exist about possible distortions from non-response bias related to who faithfully fills out the diary or responds to questions.

There was also concern that short-burst activities may not get reported. For example, moving laundry from the washer to the dryer, snacking, etc., since these may be done as secondary activities and not be reported when participants report the primary activity engaged during a period of time. I hypothesize that some of the early research undertaken with the impending data from the American Time Use Survey will address these types of questions and better inform future surveys and analyses.

A number of federal program related to food stamp and other feeding programs have embedded assumptions of how people use time. These assumptions were incorporated at the time the programs were initially set up, as long as 30 years ago. For example, the Thrifty Food Stamp Plan assumes food preparation from basic ingredients, likely to be unrealistic time commitments in today's fast-paced world. Can data from the ATUS and a food module be used to evaluate the need for revised or updated policies underlying food stamp and other food programs.

How do trends in eating away from home and food prepared away from home for in-home assumption affect future demand for various types of food? I think research using the ATUS data will be of great interest to private sector decision makers.

How do time allocations affect nutrition, physical activity and health status as they relate to obesity which is now seen as a major health issue. Does television watching with snacking as a secondary activity, and similar kinds of information that may be analyzed with ATUS data provide guidance in setting policies or strategies to deal with the obesity or other health issues?

The ability to sort out market niches or categories for various types of food and related implications for nutrition, convenience and adding value to foods will be of significant interest to the private sector and public policy officials. Market niches or categories may be targeted by ethnicity, rural vs. urban, race, geographic area, etc. To what extent will the ATUS and a food module allow us to address these questions with more precision than currently possible?

Are other relationships identifiable between food consumption activities, for example, location,

time and whether eating is a primary or secondary activity, which can inform public policy and private sector strategic decisions?

Currently, we assume that much eating away from home is driven by the time and cost efficiencies associated with mass production vs. individual preparation. Can time use analysis based on the ATUS shed light on the actual time use for meal preparation vs. the assumed time used in food preparation at home currently used for analyzing behavior? We presume that the market has responded to consumer demand, but can we learn more about the efficiency of time use and location of food preparation and eating from the survey?

These broad questions illustrate the potential research topics that can be addressed by using the data available from the American Time Use Survey and a potential food module in subsequent surveys. We have the potential to provide valuable information of significance to private sector decision makers in the food industry and public policy officials concerned with nutrition, health and food programs.