



Using Scanner Data To Answer Food Policy Questions

Conference

**Wednesday, June 1 -
Thursday, June 2, 2011**

**Economic Research Service
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Waugh Auditorium
Washington, DC**

Scanner Data and Low- Income Households

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“there is some concern that Homescan data underrepresent households in the lowest part of the income distribution ... additional research is needed to estimate how this underrepresentation, if it exists may affect our results.”

—Broda, Leibtag, and Weinstein (2009)

TABLE 2
Differences between Nielsen and CES Data

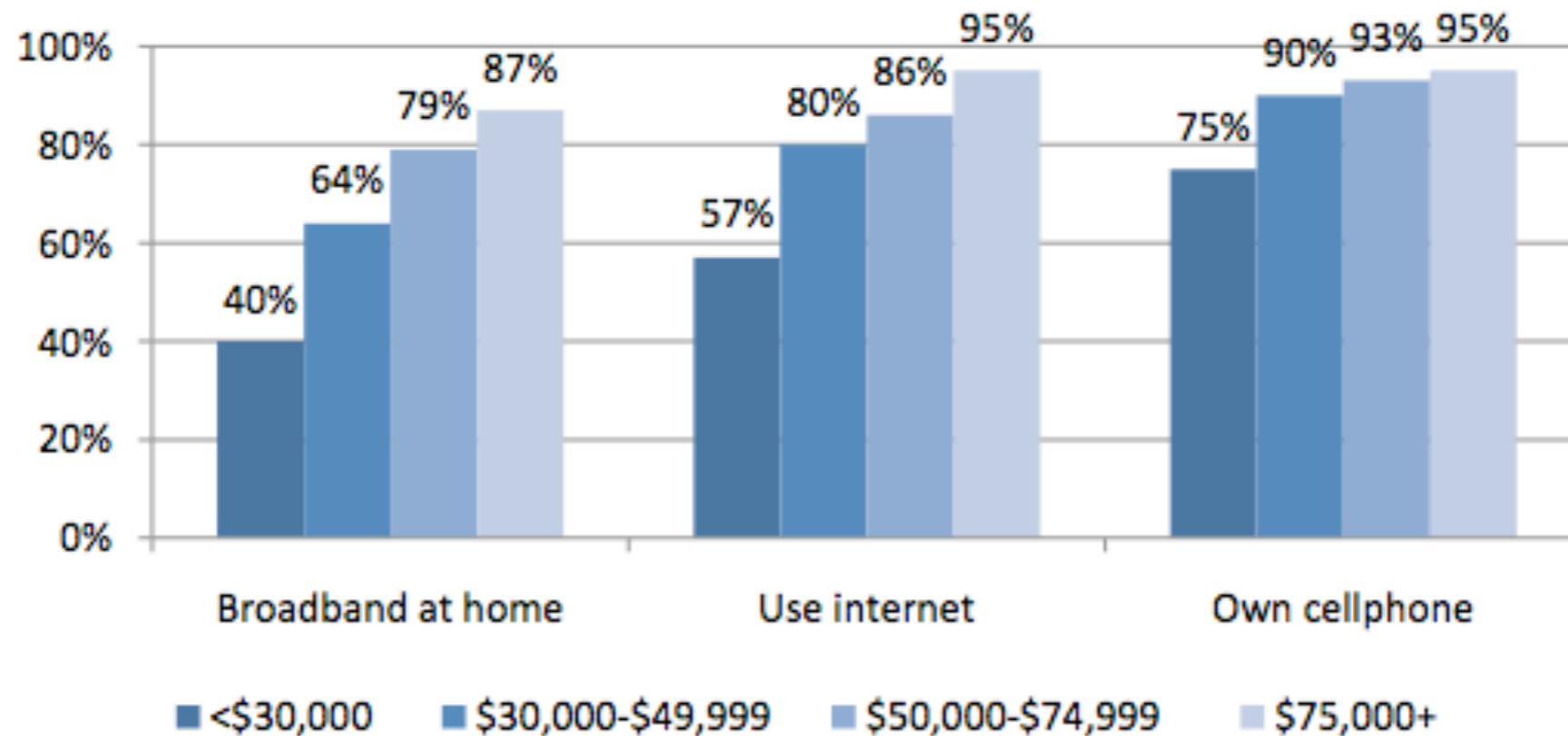
	Unweighted Data			Weighted Data		
	Homescan	Consumer Expenditure Survey	Ratio of Homescan to CES	Homescan	Consumer Expenditure Survey	Ratio of Homescan to CES
Household size	2.36	2.503		2.554	2.483	
Presence of children	24%	33%	0.73	33%	32%	1.03
Race						
Hispanic	6%	12%	0.54	10%	11%	0.91
White	83%	84%	0.99	79%	83%	0.95
Black	10%	11%	0.92	12%	12%	0.96
Asian	2%	4%	0.59	2%	3%	0.64
Presence of female head	90%	82%	1.1	81%	82%	0.99
Female head with college degree	32%	31%	1.04	20%	30%	0.67
Female head not employed for pay	38%	47%	0.8	35%	48%	0.73
Female head below age 35	7%	19%	0.35	17%	19%	0.89
Income						
Below \$5,000	0.8%	3.3%	0.24	1.3%	3.2%	0.41
\$5,000–\$9,999	2.4%	5.2%	0.46	3.7%	5.5%	0.67
\$10,000–\$14,999	4.8%	6.7%	0.72	6.7%	7.0%	0.96
\$15,000–\$19,999	5.6%	6.2%	0.9	7.4%	6.5%	1.14
\$20,000–\$29,999	14.8%	12.0%	1.23	17.5%	12.2%	1.43
\$30,000–\$39,999	14.8%	11.4%	1.3	15.0%	11.5%	1.3
\$40,000–\$49,999	13.3%	10.2%	1.3	12.4%	10.3%	1.2
\$50,000–\$69,999	19.5%	15.0%	1.3	16.7%	15.0%	1.11
\$70,000 and over	24.1%	30.0%	0.8	19.3%	28.8%	0.67

Source: Unpublished statistics from Zhen, Taylor, Muth, Leibtag (2009).

Consumers included in the Nielsen Survey have:

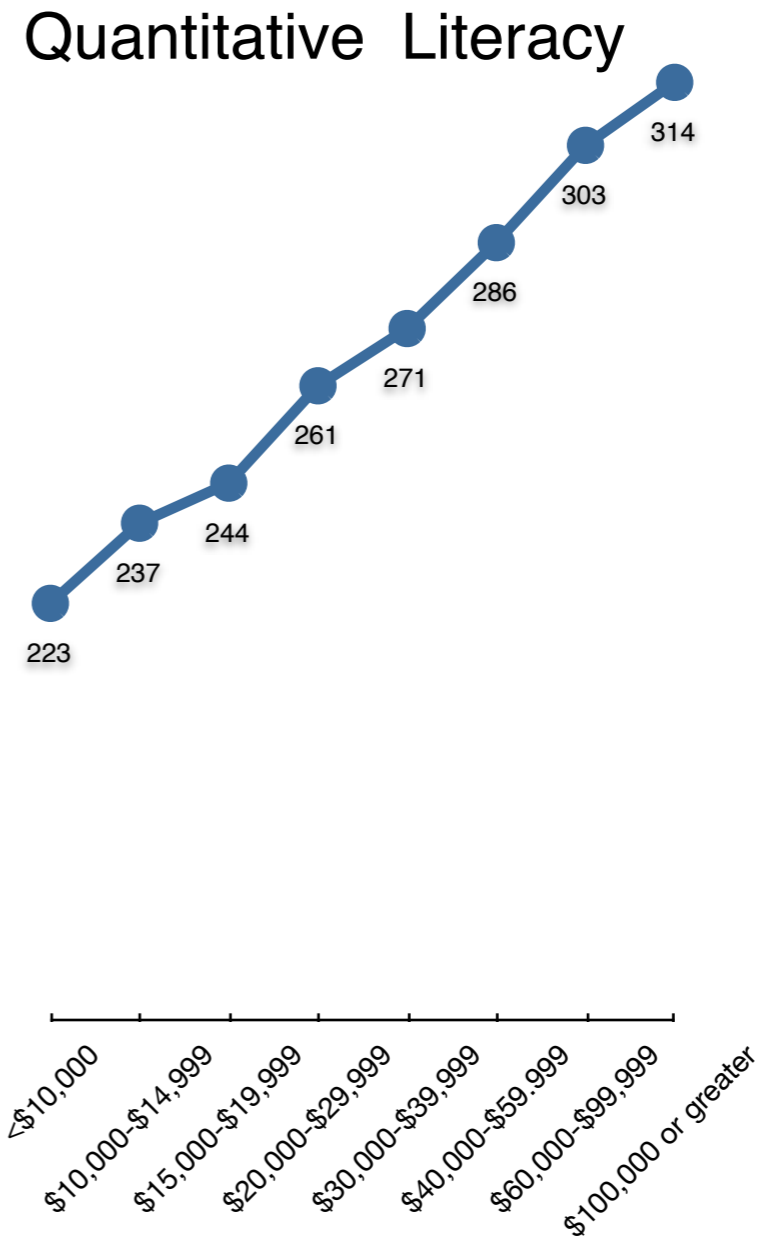
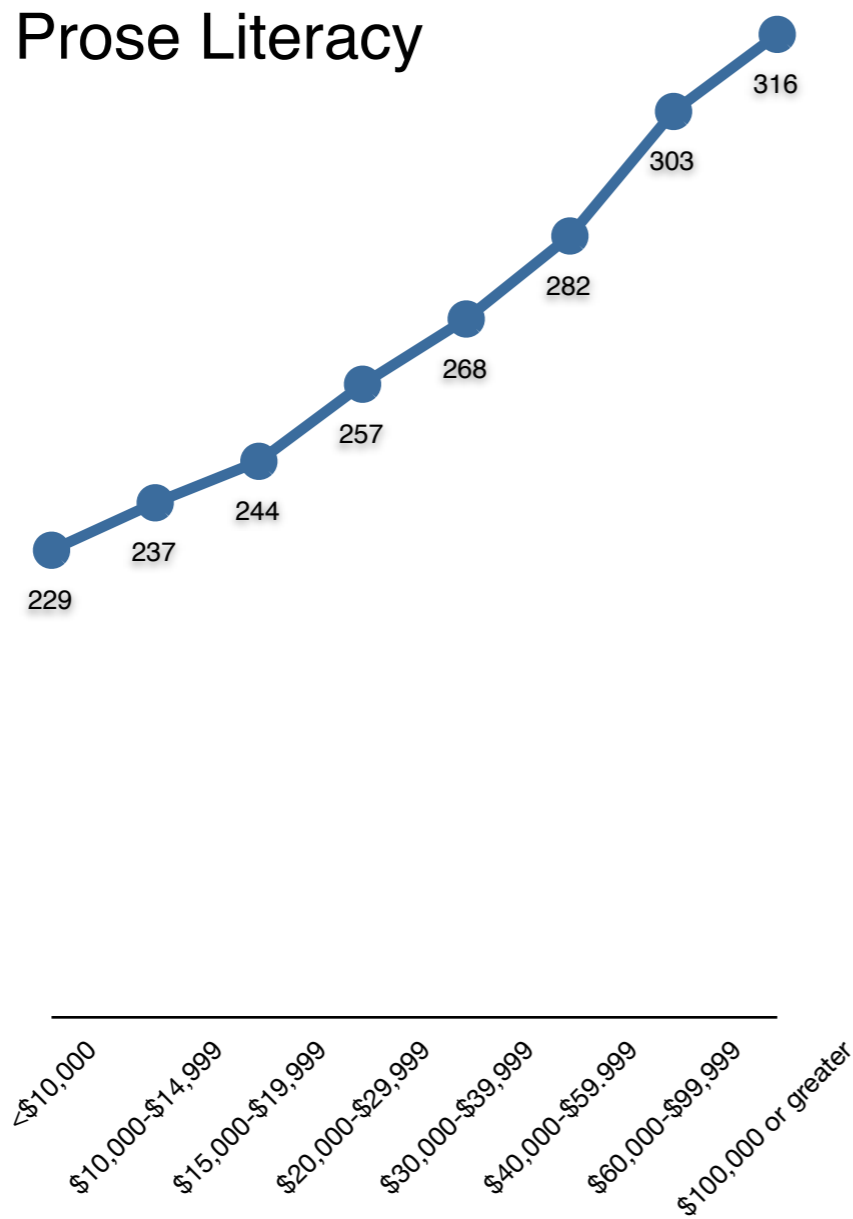
- learned about it via e-mail, direct mail, or word of mouth (according to Harris (2005) about 80% of those selected invited by e-mail);
- volunteered to participate;
- made it through the two questionnaires that are required before being added to the pool;
- once selected by Nielsen, scanned and recorded their food purchases on a weekly basis over a 10-month period, spending roughly 40 hours of their time on this task; and
- received financial incentives offered by Nielsen for continued participation.

Figure 1. Comparison of broadband access at home, cell phone ownership, and internet usage by income brackets of general population



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=3,001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points.

Average Literacy of Adults, by Household Income: 2003



27.6%

Percent of People
(Age 5 or Older)
with Income *Below*
Poverty Line who Speak
a Language Other than
English at Home

18.5%

Percent of People
(Age 5 or Older)
with Income *Above*
Poverty Line who Speak a
Language Other than
English at Home

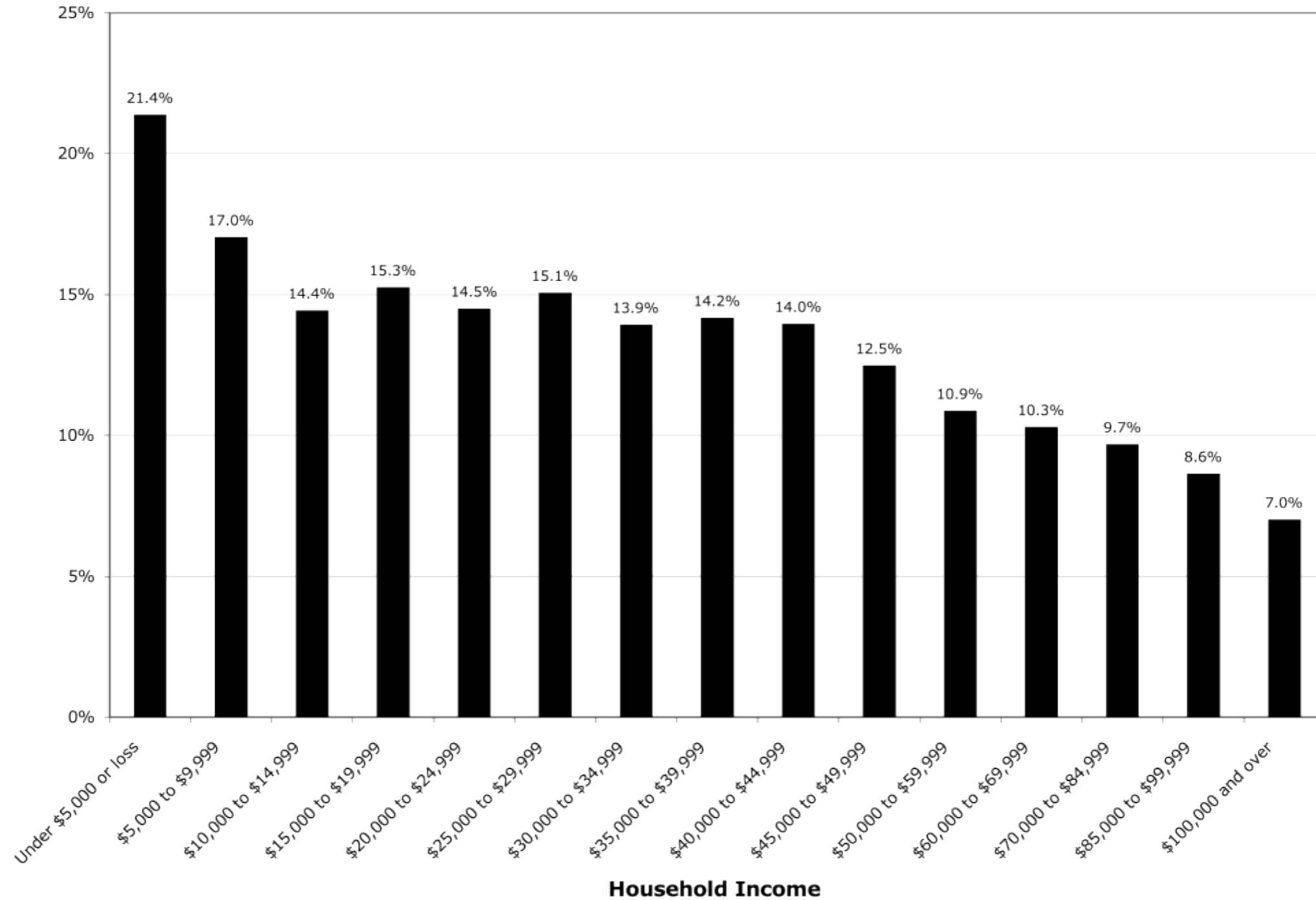
24%

Percent of People
Age 16 or Older
Below 150% of Poverty
Line with a Disability

12%

Percent of People
Age 16 or Older *Above*
150% of Poverty Line
with a Disability

Percent of Households who Moved in 2008 and 2009 by Income



Conclusions

- Additional research needed to determine scanner data representativeness of low-income households and subgroups (including people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency).
- Absent better evidence of representativeness, researchers (and policymakers) should be cautious in interpreting scanner-data research.
- For further discussion, see Fremstad, Income, Inequality, and Food Prices (2009), <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/poverty-2010-12.pdf>