
December 1998

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Information on Employment and Training Activities



**Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division**

B-281501

December 14, 1998

The Honorable John R. Kasich
Chairman, Committee on the Budget
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,¹ known as the Welfare Reform Act, made significant changes to the nation's welfare system, including the Food Stamp Program. In particular, the act limits Food Stamp Program participants who are able-bodied adults between the ages of 18 and 50 and without dependents to 3 months of food stamp benefits within a 3-year period unless they (1) meet work requirements or (2) are exempted from these requirements because they live in areas with high unemployment or an insufficient number of jobs. These able-bodied adults can meet the work requirements by (1) working a minimum of 80 hours a month; (2) participating in qualifying state employment and training programs for 20 hours a week; or (3) participating in Workfare, which provides work in a public service capacity in exchange for public benefits, such as food stamps.

Concerns were raised that some of the able-bodied adults without dependents who were willing to work were not able to find opportunities to meet the Welfare Reform Act's work requirements. In response, in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997,² the Congress increased funding for the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program to a total of \$212 million for fiscal year 1998 and specified that 80 percent of the total had to be spent to help able-bodied adults without dependents meet the work requirements. The Balanced Budget Act also gave the states the option of exempting up to 15 percent of all able-bodied adults without dependents not otherwise exempted from the work requirements.

This report responds to your request for information on (1) the number of able-bodied adults without dependents who are receiving food stamp benefits, the number who are required to meet the work requirements, and the number who are exempted from the requirements; (2) the number of able-bodied adults without dependents participating in qualifying employment and training or Workfare programs; and (3) the amounts of federal grant funds that states spent through the first three quarters of

¹P.L. 104-193, Aug. 22, 1996.

²P.L. 105-33, Aug. 5, 1997.

fiscal year 1998 for employment and training or Workfare programs for food stamp recipients.

The information we developed in response to your request is based in part on our September 1998 survey of state officials administering food stamp employment and training programs. Officials in all the states and the District of Columbia responded to our survey covering participation in the Food Stamp Program by able-bodied adults without dependents for the months of April, May, and June 1998. Most states provided estimates of participation, while a few were able to provide data from their records. Forty-two state agencies³—which served just over 90 percent of food stamp participants nationwide—provided sufficient data for reporting on the number of able-bodied adults without dependents who were receiving food stamps and were required to meet the work requirements or who were waived or exempted from those requirements. Only 24 states—which served about half of food stamp participants nationwide—were able to provide sufficient data for reporting on the numbers of able-bodied adults without dependents who were participating in employment and training and/or Workfare.

Results in Brief

In the 42 states providing sufficient data for analysis, a monthly average of about 514,200 able-bodied adults without dependents received food stamp benefits during April, May, and June 1998. About 58 percent of these individuals were required to meet the work requirements; another 40 percent were not required to work because they lived in areas that were considered to have high unemployment or an insufficient number of jobs; and 2 percent had been exempted by the states from the work requirements.

In the 24 states providing sufficient data for analysis, a monthly average of 23,600 able-bodied adults without dependents filled state-sponsored employment and training and/or Workfare positions. These participants represented about 17 percent of the able-bodied adults without dependents who were required to work in those states in order to receive food stamp benefits. These individuals also accounted for about half of the able-bodied adults without dependents who were offered employment and training assistance and/or Workfare positions by these states.

³Throughout the report, we refer to the state agencies as “states” and include the District of Columbia in this group.

As of June 30, 1998—with one-fourth of fiscal year 1998 remaining—all the states had spent only about 28 percent, or \$60.2 million, of the \$212 million available for state employment and training programs for food stamp recipients. Also, according to preliminary fourth-quarter financial data, 43 states had spent about \$72 million, or 41 percent of the grant funds available to them for fiscal year 1998. According to federal and state officials, the low percentage of spending for food stamp employment and training programs occurred primarily because (1) fewer able-bodied adults without dependents were required to work than anticipated and fewer than anticipated accepted this assistance and (2) some states needed more time to refocus their food stamp employment and training programs to target these individuals.

Background

The Food Stamp Program helps low-income individuals and families obtain a more nutritious diet by supplementing their income with food stamp benefits. The average monthly food stamp benefit was about \$70 per person during fiscal year 1997.⁴ The program is a federal-state partnership in which the federal government pays the cost of the food stamp benefits and 50 percent of the states' administrative costs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the program at the federal level. The states' responsibilities include certifying eligible households and calculating and issuing benefits to those who qualify.

The Food Stamp Employment and Training Program, which existed prior to the Welfare Reform Act, was established to ensure that all able-bodied recipients registered for employment services as a condition of food stamp eligibility. The program's role is to provide food stamp recipients with opportunities that will lead to paid employment and decrease dependency on assistance programs. In fiscal year 1997, the states were granted \$79 million in federal employment and training funding and spent \$73.9 million, or 94 percent of the grant. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the Congress increased grant funding for the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program to a total of \$212 million for fiscal year 1998 and specified that 80 percent of the total had to be spent to help able-bodied adults without dependents meet the work requirements. For

⁴Able-bodied adults without dependents typically receive a higher benefit amount, about \$108 a month, on average.

fiscal year 1999, the Congress provided \$115 million in employment and training funding.⁵ These funds remain available until expended.

Employment programs that the states choose to offer may involve the public and private sectors. For example, Workfare, which qualifies as an employment program under the Welfare Reform Act, requires individuals to work in a public service capacity in exchange for public benefits such as food stamps. Some states also allow participants to meet the work requirements by volunteering at nonprofit organizations. However, under the Welfare Reform Act, job search and job readiness training are specifically excluded as qualifying activities for meeting the act's work requirements.

Over Half of Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents Are Required to Work

During April, May, and June 1998, a monthly average of about 514,200 able-bodied adults without dependents received food stamp benefits, according to information from the 42 states providing sufficient data for analysis. These adults represented about 3 percent of the monthly average of 17.5 million food stamp participants in the 42 states during that period. Of the 514,200 individuals, about 58 percent, or 296,400 of the able-bodied adults without dependents were required to meet the work requirements; 40 percent, or 208,200, were exempted from these requirements because they lived in geographic areas that had received waivers; and 2 percent, or 9,600, had been exempted by the states from the work requirements. (See app. I for state-by-state information.)

The number of able-bodied adults without dependents receiving food stamp benefits has apparently declined in recent years, as has their share of participation in the program. For example, in 1995, a monthly average of 1.2 million⁶ able-bodied adults without dependents in 42 states participated in the Food Stamp Program, compared with the 514,200 individuals who participated in the period we reviewed. In addition, in 1995, 5 percent of food stamp participants were estimated to be able-bodied adults without dependents, compared with the 3 percent we identified through our survey of the states. FNS and state officials

⁵Under the Balanced Budget Act, the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program was originally allocated \$215 million in funding for fiscal year 1999. However, this funding level was reduced by \$100 million through the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-185, June 23, 1998).

⁶In an average month in fiscal year 1995, 1.3 million able-bodied adults without dependents, or 5 percent of the food stamp population nationwide, were estimated to be subject to the work requirements, according to data developed for FNS. These data were reported to FNS in *Characteristics of Childless Unemployed Adult and Legal Immigrant Food Stamp Participants* (Washington, D.C.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Feb. 1997).

accounted for these differences by pointing out that (1) food stamp participation has decreased overall—from about 27 million per month nationwide in 1995 to about 19.5 million in April, May, and June 1998; (2) some able-bodied adults without dependents may have obtained employment and no longer needed food stamps; and (3) others who were terminated from the program may not have realized that they could regain eligibility for food stamp benefits through participation in state-sponsored employment and training programs or Workfare. Also, the states vary in the criteria they use for identifying able-bodied adults subject to the work requirements.⁷

Relatively Few Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents Participated in Employment and Training and Workfare Programs

During April, May, and June 1998, a monthly average of 23,600 able-bodied adults without dependents filled employment and training and/or Workfare positions in the 24 states that provided sufficient data for analysis. Fifteen of these states offered Workfare positions, 20 offered employment and training positions, and 11 offered both Workfare and employment and training positions. The 23,600 individuals accounted for about half of the 47,000 able-bodied adults without dependents who were offered state-sponsored employment and training assistance and/or Workfare positions.⁸ More specifically:

- Able-bodied adults without dependents filled about 8,000 Workfare positions per month, or 34 percent of the 23,700 Workfare positions offered by the 15 states with Workfare positions;
- Able-bodied adults without dependents filled about 15,600 employment and training positions per month, or 67 percent of the 23,300 employment and training positions offered by the 20 states. (See app. I for state-by-state information.)

These 23,600 individuals accounted for about 17 percent of the 137,200 able-bodied adults without dependents who were subject to the work requirements in those states. Of the remaining 113,600, some may have been within the 3-month time frame for receiving food stamp benefits while not working, others may have met these requirements by finding

⁷According to an FNS study, some states are more stringent than others in identifying able-bodied adults without dependents. For example, 31 states exempt all adults in a household with dependent children from the work requirement, 16 exempt one or both parents, and 2 exempt only one parent. FNS is reviewing draft federal regulations that will address how states determine the status of able-bodied adults.

⁸Of the remaining states, 18 reported offering employment and training and/or Workfare positions but did not provide sufficient data for inclusion in this report, and 9 did not offer employment and training or Workfare programs to this group during those months.

jobs or Workfare positions on their own, and some may not have met the work requirements, thereby forfeiting their food stamp benefits.

FNS and state officials said they could not yet explain the limited participation in employment and training and Workfare programs, but FNS officials and some states are trying to develop information on the reasons for low participation. In addition, some suggested that able-bodied adults without dependents participated to a limited extent in employment and training programs and Workfare because they (1) participate sporadically in the Food Stamp Program,⁹ (2) prefer not to work, or (3) believe that the relatively low value of food stamp benefits is not enough of an incentive to meet the work requirements.

States Spent Less Than Authorized

With only 3 months remaining in fiscal year 1998, the states were spending at a rate that would result in the use of significantly less grant funds for food stamp employment and training recipients than authorized. For the first three quarters of the fiscal year, through June 30, 1998, the states spent only 28.4 percent, or \$60.2 million, of the \$212 million in grants, according to FNS data. The rate of spending varied widely by state, ranging from 75 percent, or about \$230,000 of the \$307,000 authorized for South Dakota, to less than 1 percent, or \$109,000 of the \$13.4 million authorized for Michigan. Twenty-five of the states spent less than 20 percent of their grant funds, 17 spent between 20 and 49 percent, and 9 spent 50 percent or more. Also, according to preliminary fourth-quarter financial data reported to FNS, 43 states spent about \$72 million, or 41 percent of the grant funds available to them for fiscal year 1998. (See app. II.)

To better understand why the states were spending less of their grant funds than authorized, we interviewed food stamp directors and employment and training officials in 10 geographically dispersed states.¹⁰ In general, according to these officials, grant spending has been significantly less than authorized because (1) some states had a limited number of able-bodied adults without dependents who were required to work, (2) some states needed time to refocus their programs on

⁹For example, in an average month in 1996, one-third of able-bodied adults without dependents receiving food stamps had participated in the program for 3 months or less, according to a study prepared for FNS. In addition, only 29 percent participated in the Food Stamp Program for a year or longer compared with about 50 percent for all adult participants in the program. The source of this information is *The Effect of Welfare Reform on Able-Bodied Food Stamp Recipients* (Washington, D.C.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., July 1998).

¹⁰These states were Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia.

able-bodied adults without dependents,¹¹ and (3) some states reported that it was difficult to serve clients in sparsely populated areas because of transportation problems or the lack of appropriate jobs. When asked whether spending would change in fiscal year 1999, state officials had differing expectations. Officials from 4 of the 10 states—Georgia, Iowa, Ohio, and West Virginia—said that they anticipate spending about the same or less, and Pennsylvania officials were unsure whether spending would change. In contrast, officials from five states—Illinois, Michigan, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington—anticipate increases in spending, mostly because of the improvements they have made to their employment and training programs.

In discussing the rate of grant spending, officials of five states—Georgia, Pennsylvania, Washington, Texas, and West Virginia—said that the requirement to spend 80 percent of funds on able-bodied adults without dependents had caused them to decrease employment and training services to other food stamp participants. For fiscal year 1998, a maximum of 20 percent of the available grant funds—\$42 million—was available for employment and training activities for other food stamp recipients, while \$79 million had been provided for employment and training activities for all food stamp recipients in fiscal year 1997. State officials explained that prior to fiscal year 1998, most employment and training funds had been spent for food stamp participants who were not able-bodied adults without dependents. With the shift in funds to able-bodied adults without dependents, less has remained for the other food stamp recipients, who typically had constituted the majority of the employment and training participants in the past. Nevertheless, some of those not served by Food Stamp Employment and Training Programs may be eligible to receive employment and training through other federal and state programs.

Agency Comments

We provided USDA's Food and Nutrition Service with a copy of a draft of this report for review and comment. We met with Food and Nutrition Service officials, who provided comments from the Food and Nutrition Service's Office of General Counsel and the Director, Program Analysis Division, Office of Food Stamp Programs. The Food and Nutrition Service generally agreed with the contents of the report and provided technical and clarifying comments that we incorporated into the report as appropriate.

¹¹FNS provided guidance to the states on how to implement the Balanced Budget Act's provisions in February 1998, 5 months after the beginning of the fiscal year.

Scope and Methodology

To obtain information on the numbers of able-bodied adults without dependents who are receiving food stamps benefits, are required to meet work requirements, are exempted from the work requirements, and are participating in qualifying employment and training and/or Workfare programs, we surveyed the states and the District of Columbia. The survey data covered the months of April, May, and June 1998. We used the participation data for these months to estimate average monthly participation in the program. All states and the District of Columbia responded to our faxed questionnaire, and we contacted state officials as needed to verify their responses. Eighty-eight percent of the responses provided by 41 states and the District of Columbia were based on estimates and the remaining on data in state records. According to the state officials who provided estimates, their information systems were in the process of being revised and they plan to have actual data for fiscal year 1999.

To obtain information on state spending of federal grants for employment and training programs, we obtained FNS' grant funding data reported by the states and the District of Columbia for the first three quarters of fiscal 1998, the latest data that were available as of November 1998. We subsequently obtained preliminary financial data for the fourth quarter of fiscal year 1998, which are subject to change after financial reconciliation. To supplement these data, we interviewed state food stamp directors or employment and training officials in 10 geographically dispersed states, including Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia.

We performed our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards from July through November 1998.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the appropriate Senate and House Committees; interested Members of Congress; the Secretary of Agriculture; the Administrator of FNS; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

Please call me at (202) 512-5138 if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Robert E. Robertson
Associate Director, Food
and Agriculture Issues

Contents

Letter	1
Appendix I Average Number of Food Stamp Recipients and Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents in 42 States in April, May, and June 1998	12
Appendix II Federal Funds Expended for Food Stamp Employment and Training, First Three Quarters of FY 1998 and Preliminary Expenditures for FY 1998	14
Appendix III Major Contributors to This Report	16

Abbreviations

FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
GAO	General Accounting Office
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

Average Number of Food Stamp Recipients and Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents in 42 States in April, May, and June 1998

Numbers of individuals

Able-bodied adults without dependents^b

States	Total food stamp recipients ^a	Able-bodied adults without dependents ^b							
		Total	Required to work	Waived	Exempted	Workfare		Employment and training	
						Offered	Filled	Offered	Filled
Alabama	420,443	4,980	3,990	990	c	199 ^e	199 ^e	c	c
Alaska	47,000	507	0	506	1	c	c	c	c
Arkansas	254,087	d	d	d	d	63	63	c	c
Arizona	287,229	415	340	75	c	c	c	21	21
California	2,226,087	99,383	93,000	2,883	3,500	d	d	d	d
Colorado	187,998	1,353	1,125	218	10	152	88	706	230
Connecticut	193,827	5,692	1,690	4,002	c	c	c	91	61
District of Columbia	83,966	533	417	116	c	c	c	46	36
Delaware	44,339	182	182	c	c	c	c	c	c
Florida	955,012	17,445	9,948	7,001	497	417	354	10,662	7,820
Georgia	618,100	14,074	5,737	8,328	9	c	c	d	d
Hawaii	121,522	5,637	275	5,362	c	c	c	48	34
Idaho	65,109	727	600	101	25	d	d	d	d
Illinois	916,183	54,615	9,962	43,194	1,458	7,326	4,888	619	562
Indiana	305,926	3,663	2,644	1,017	2	d	d	d	d
Iowa	141,325	1,708	1,708	c	c	1	1	c	c
Kansas	116,413	2,353	2,078	c	275	c	c	c	c
Kentucky	409,161	24,512	2,502	21,481	528	c	c	369	191
Louisiana	535,376	16,939	3,626	12,135	1,178	45	13	341	98
Maine	114,911	d	d	d	d	c	c	d	d
Maryland	322,077	6,200	1,265	4,705	230	c	c	d	d
Massachusetts	284,422	1,509	1,106	c	403	c	c	c	c
Michigan	792,268	16,374	16,374	c	c	d	d	d	d
Minnesota	209,737	5,571	4,586	756	228	1,657 ^f	102	1,657 ^f	1,564
Mississippi	321,374	3,017	3,017	c	c	402	284	43	30
Missouri	403,863	6,475	2,300	4,175	c	c	c	d	d
Montana	62,987	d	d	d	c	c	c	c	c
Nebraska	92,870	274	146	10	118	d	d	d	d
Nevada	69,948	1,254	950	304	c	c	c	c	c
New Hampshire	39,841	d	d	d	d	d	d	d	d
New Jersey	419,245	d	d	d	c	1,564 ^f	396	1,564 ^f	68
New Mexico	169,068	6,000	2,000	4,000	c	c	c	d	d
New York	1,611,600	89,410	49,667	39,733	10	c	c	2,000	1,100
North Carolina	518,986	12,060	11,269	c	791	16	12	951	720

(continued)

**Appendix I
Average Number of Food Stamp Recipients
and Able-Bodied Adults Without
Dependents in 42 States in April, May, and
June 1998**

Numbers of individuals

Able-bodied adults without dependents^b

States	Total food stamp recipients ^a	Total	Required to work	Waived	Exempted	Workfare		Employment and training	
						Offered	Filled	Offered	Filled
North Dakota	34,206	1,233	943	290	c	c	c	2	1
Ohio	713,366	5,421	5,421	c	c	3,421	1,368	800	119
Oklahoma	281,814	d	d	c	c	c	c	c	c
Oregon	238,932	8,421	8,200	c	221	8,200	195	c	c
Pennsylvania	898,774	38,400	21,200	17,200	c	d	d	d	d
Rhode Island	72,039	2,411	371	2,040	c	c	c	c	c
South Carolina	329,615	d	d	d	d	116	61	139	159
South Dakota	45,673	1,137	410	727	c	76	15	333	63
Tennessee	533,561	8,937	6,217	2,720	c	c	c	253	161
Texas	1,578,749	18,495	8,769	9,726	c	d	d	d	d
Utah	92,443	2,320	2,075	245	c	d	d	d	d
Virginia	386,230	d	d	d	c	d	d	d	d
Vermont	48,163	457	407	50	c	d	d	c	c
Washington	362,961	3,653	1,231	2,294	128	d	d	d	d
West Virginia	266,107	14,476	2,645	11,831	c	c	c	d	d
Wisconsin	188,322	6,035	6,035	c	c	c	c	2,644	2,557
Wyoming	25,814	d	d	d	c	c	c	d	d
Total	19,459,071	514,257	296,428	208,215	9,613	23,655	8,039	23,289	15,593

^aAverage number of food stamp participants (by individual) in April, May, and June 1998 per Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) data.

^bAccording to data reported by state agencies through GAO survey.

^cThis option in the Food Stamp Program not exercised by the state.

^dData insufficient for analysis.

^eReflects state-reported data for only one month of operations.

^fReflects state-reported data of one total for employment and training and workfare.

Source: GAO's analysis of FNS and state-reported survey data.

Federal Funds Expended for Food Stamp Employment and Training, First Three Quarters of FY 1998 and Preliminary Expenditures for FY 1998

(Dollars in thousands)

States	Federal employment and training grant	Grant funds expended through the third quarter	Percent of grant funds expended through the third quarter	Fiscal year 1998 grant funds expended ^a	Percent of fiscal year 1998 grant funds expended ^a
California	\$25,996	\$7,601	29	\$13,178	51
Texas	16,293	4,590	28	13,817	85
New York	14,993	9,709	65	10,589	71
Michigan	13,410	109	1	164	1
Pennsylvania	12,321	941	8	941	8
Illinois	11,230	4,982	44	^b	^b
Florida	9,165	3,488	38	5,365	59
Ohio	7,731	3,135	41	^b	^b
Tennessee	6,658	1,449	22	1,655	25
Georgia	6,137	3,729	61	^b	^b
Louisiana	5,869	1,855	32	2,399	41
Missouri	5,186	825	16	988	19
Kentucky	4,861	1,245	26	1,832	38
Virginia	4,551	984	22	1,730	38
North Carolina	4,529	828	18	869	19
Alabama	4,309	740	17	1,013	24
West Virginia	4,046	406	10	447	11
Washington	3,973	694	18	1,813	46
Oregon	3,593	611	17	771	22
Mississippi	3,578	1,412	40	^b	^b
New Jersey	3,093	2,053	66	3,093	100
Indiana	3,013	831	28	^b	^b
Oklahoma	2,814	492	18	575	20
Arizona	2,735	1,354	50	1,996	73
Connecticut	2,703	314	12	459	17
Arkansas	2,404	168	7	264	11
Massachusetts	2,259	27	1	^b	^b
Minnesota	2,242	709	32	856	38
South Carolina	2,230	742	33	1,078	48
Maryland	2,044	97	5	127	6
District of Columbia	1,745	222	13	309	18
Hawaii	1,658	90	5	597	36
Maine	1,648	478	29	629	38
Wisconsin	1,554	119	8	593	38

(continued)

**Appendix II
Federal Funds Expended for Food Stamp
Employment and Training, First Three
Quarters of FY 1998 and Preliminary
Expenditures for FY 1998**

(Dollars in thousands)

States	Federal employment and training grant	Grant funds expended through the third quarter	Percent of grant funds expended through the third quarter	Fiscal year 1998 grant funds expended^a	Percent of fiscal year 1998 grant funds expended^a
New Mexico	1,396	99	7	^b	^b
Colorado	1,107	614	56	1,107	100
Nevada	1,093	137	13	179	16
Iowa	1,043	286	27	378	36
Kansas	992	198	20	198	20
Vermont	656	338	52	363	55
Nebraska	594	362	61	435	73
Utah	591	73	12	153	26
Montana	571	304	53	304	53
Alaska	568	92	16	^b	^b
Rhode Island	560	52	9	70	13
Idaho	538	195	36	308	57
North Dakota	370	55	15	152	41
Wyoming	356	65	18	73	20
Delaware	346	100	29	134	39
South Dakota	307	230	75	230	75
New Hampshire	218	8	4	8	4
Total^c	\$211,881	\$60,234	28	\$72,239^b	41^b

^aFiscal year expenditure amounts are preliminary and subject to change after financial reconciliation, according to FNS officials.

^bFourth-quarter expenditures for eight states were not available from FNS as of Nov. 30, 1998. Total and percent of total does not include expenditures for these states. Expenditures reported by all states, as of Nov. 24, 1998, amounted to \$86 million.

^cNumbers may not add due to rounding.

Source: GAO's analysis of FNS' data.

Major Contributors to This Report

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