

# WIC Research at ERS



Vic Oliveira USDA, Economic Research Service  
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The views expressed today are mine and should not be attributed to the Economic Research Service or USDA



# Economic Research Service (ERS)

- Federal statistical agency
- Staff is comprised of over 250 researchers (mostly economists)
- Provides research to inform decision makers
- Conducts research on a wide range of topics reflecting the mission of USDA



# ERS Research Topics

- Food and Nutrition
- Agricultural Economy
- Food Safety
- Global Markets and Trade
- Resources and Environment
- Rural Economy



# Outline

- Completed ERS research (2016)
- Completed ERS-funded research (2016)
- Ongoing research



# Research Completed by ERS in 2016





United States Department of Agriculture

Economic  
Research  
Service

Economic  
Information  
Bulletin  
Number 152

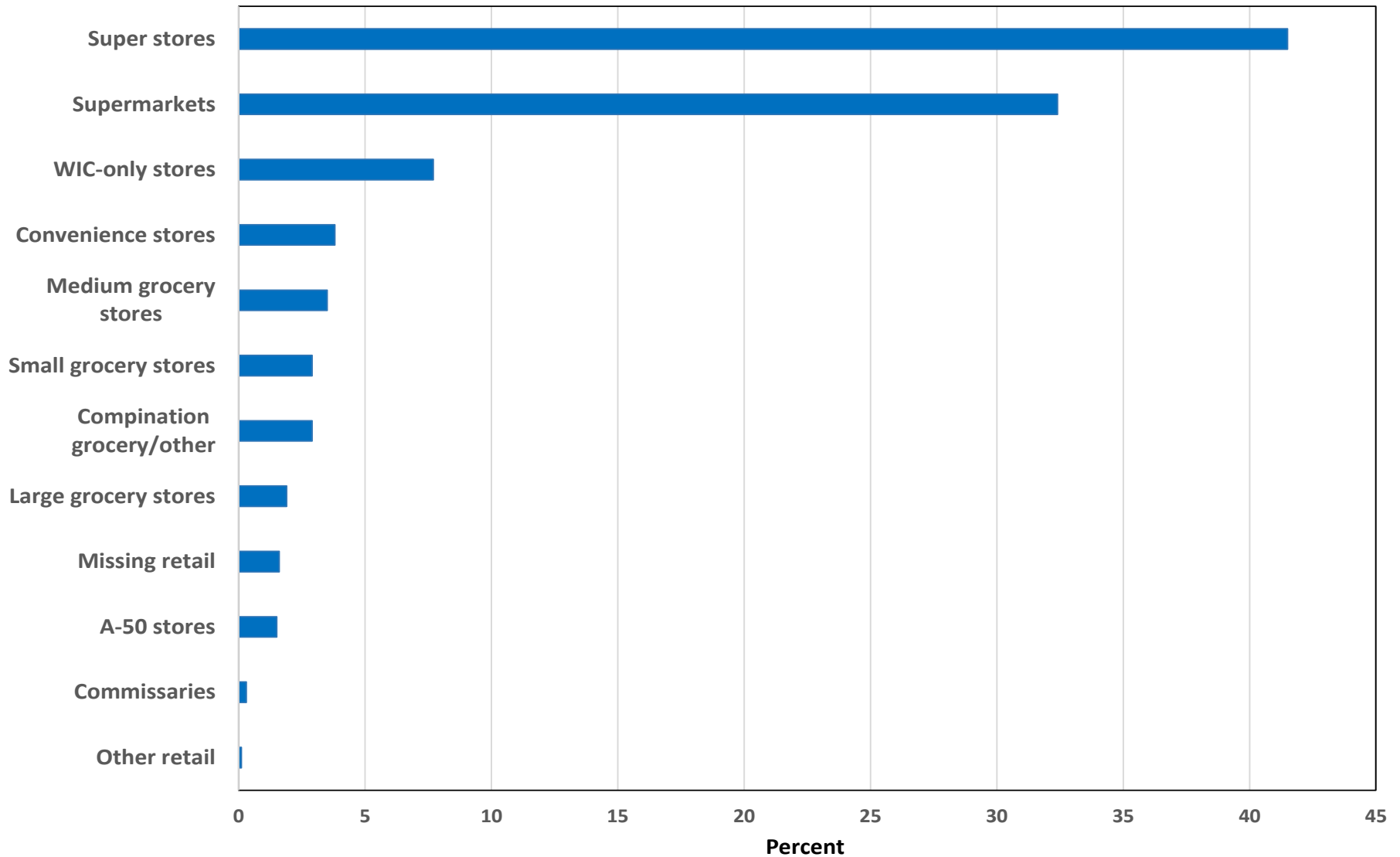
April 2016

# Where Do WIC Participants Redeem Their Food Benefits? An Analysis of WIC Food Dollar Redemption Patterns by Store Type

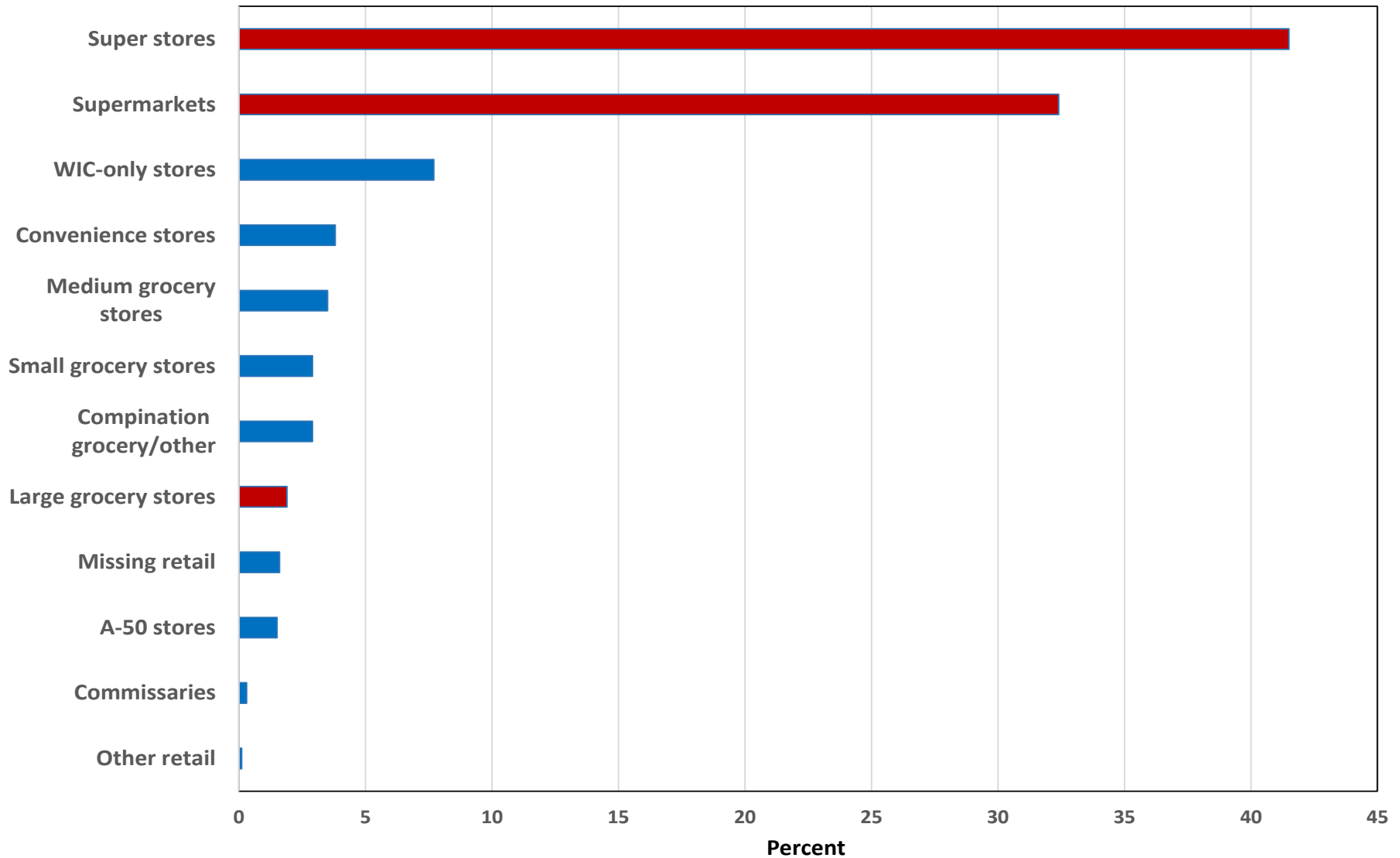
Laura Tiehen and Elizabeth Frazão



## Percent of WIC redemptions by store type, FY 2012



## Percent of WIC redemptions by store type, FY 2012







United States Department of Agriculture

Economic  
Research  
Service  
  
Economic  
Research  
Report  
Number 207  
  
May 2016

# WIC Household Food Purchases Using WIC Benefits or Paying Out of Pocket: A Case Study of Cold Cereal Purchases

Diansheng Dong, Hayden Stewart, Elizabeth Frazão,  
Andrea Carlson, and Jeffrey Hyman



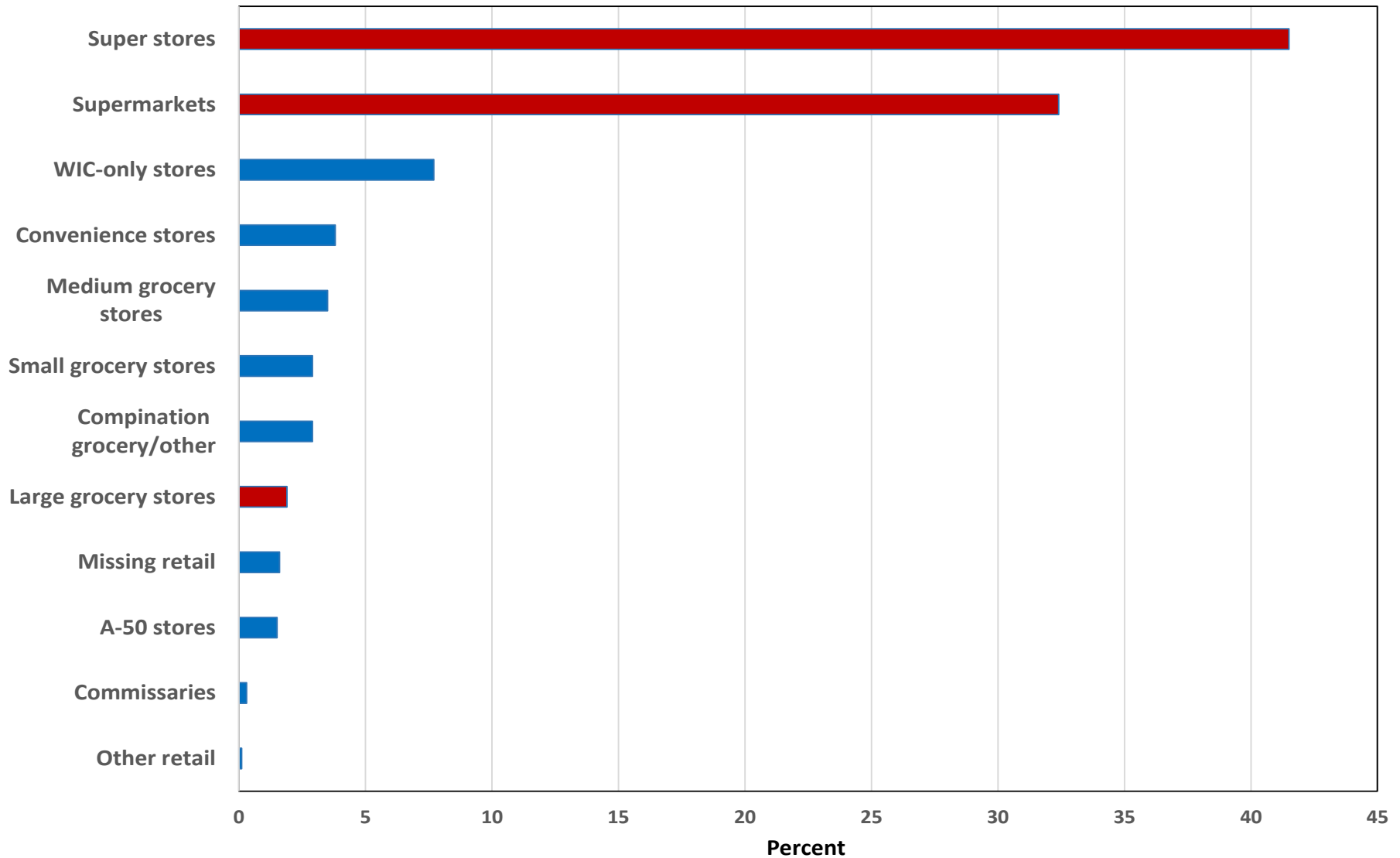
# WIC Household Food Purchases Using WIC Benefits or Paying Out of Pocket: A Case Study of Cold Cereal Purchases

## Findings:

- Private-label cereals are less expensive than national brands
- Restrictions on number of national-brand cereals allowed has no effect
- Larger size boxes tend to cost less
- Cold cereals are typically less expensive if bought from large grocery stores, super stores, or supermarkets
- Allowing participants to use their benefits at a wide range of store types may have little impact on WIC's overall food costs



## Percent of WIC redemptions by store type, FY 2012



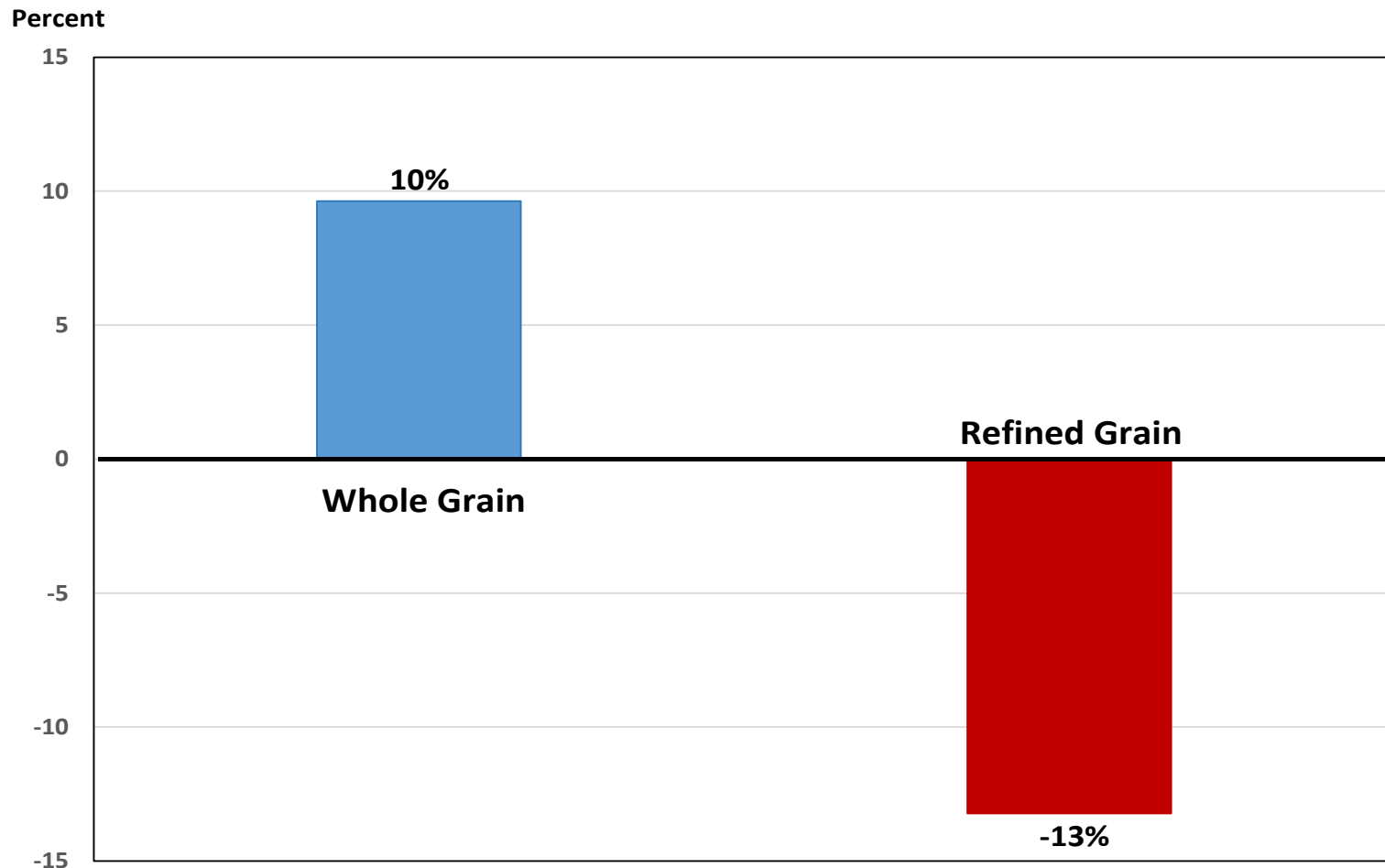
# 2016 ERS-Funded Research

## **“Did Revisions to the WIC Program Affect Household Expenditures on Whole Grains?”**

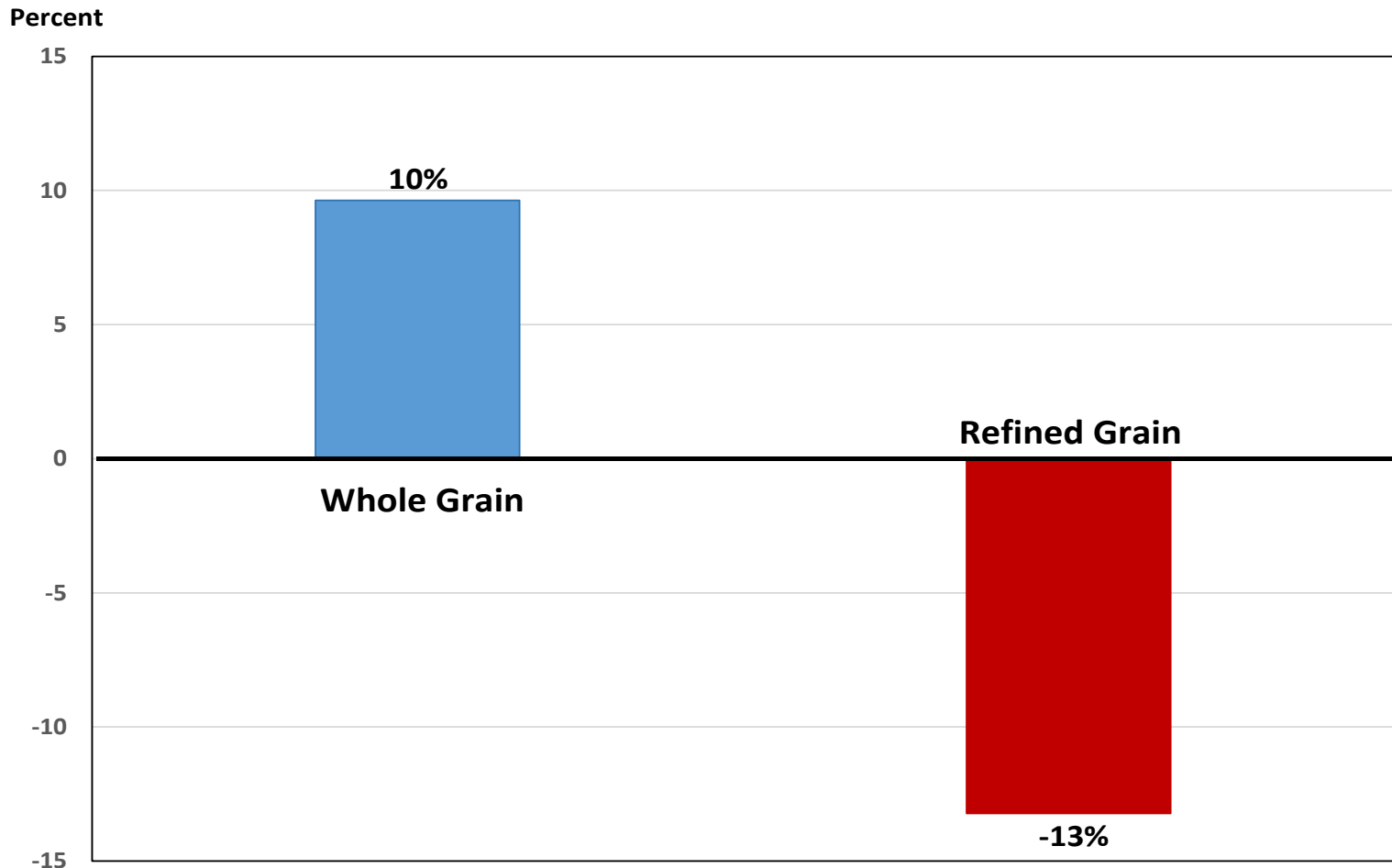
*Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, Vol. 38, No. 4,  
December 2016, by Miyoung Oh, Helen H. Jensen, and Ilya  
Rahkovsky



## Change in WIC households' expenditures for grain products after the 2009 revisions in the WIC food packages



## Change in WIC households' expenditures for grain products after the 2009 revisions in the WIC food packages



*Results "suggest that moderate innovations in the design of food assistance programs can lead to beneficial dietary choices."*



# ERS-Funded Research-cont.

## **“The Healthfulness of Food and Beverage Purchases After the Federal Food Package Revisions: The Case of Two New England States”**

*Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 91, October 2016, by Tatiana Andreyeva and Amanda S. Trippe.

### Findings:

- After the WIC revisions, purchases of healthy food increased and less healthy foods declined
- Improvement in beverage purchases
- “Efforts to encourage healthy eating by people receiving federal food assistance are paying off”



# Ongoing Research at ERS

## The Availability and Demand for Whole Wheat Bread Among WIC Households

- Availability of WIC-size loaves (16 oz) in stores
- How often WIC households purchase whole wheat bread with WIC benefits
- Whether WIC households purchase whole wheat bread with their own money





# Ongoing Research at ERS-cont.

## The Economics of Food Vendors Specialized to Serving the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

- Study patterns of WIC benefit redemption in California
- Estimate the effect of disallowing A-50 vendors on:
  - » Participant access to WIC vendors
  - » Redemption costs



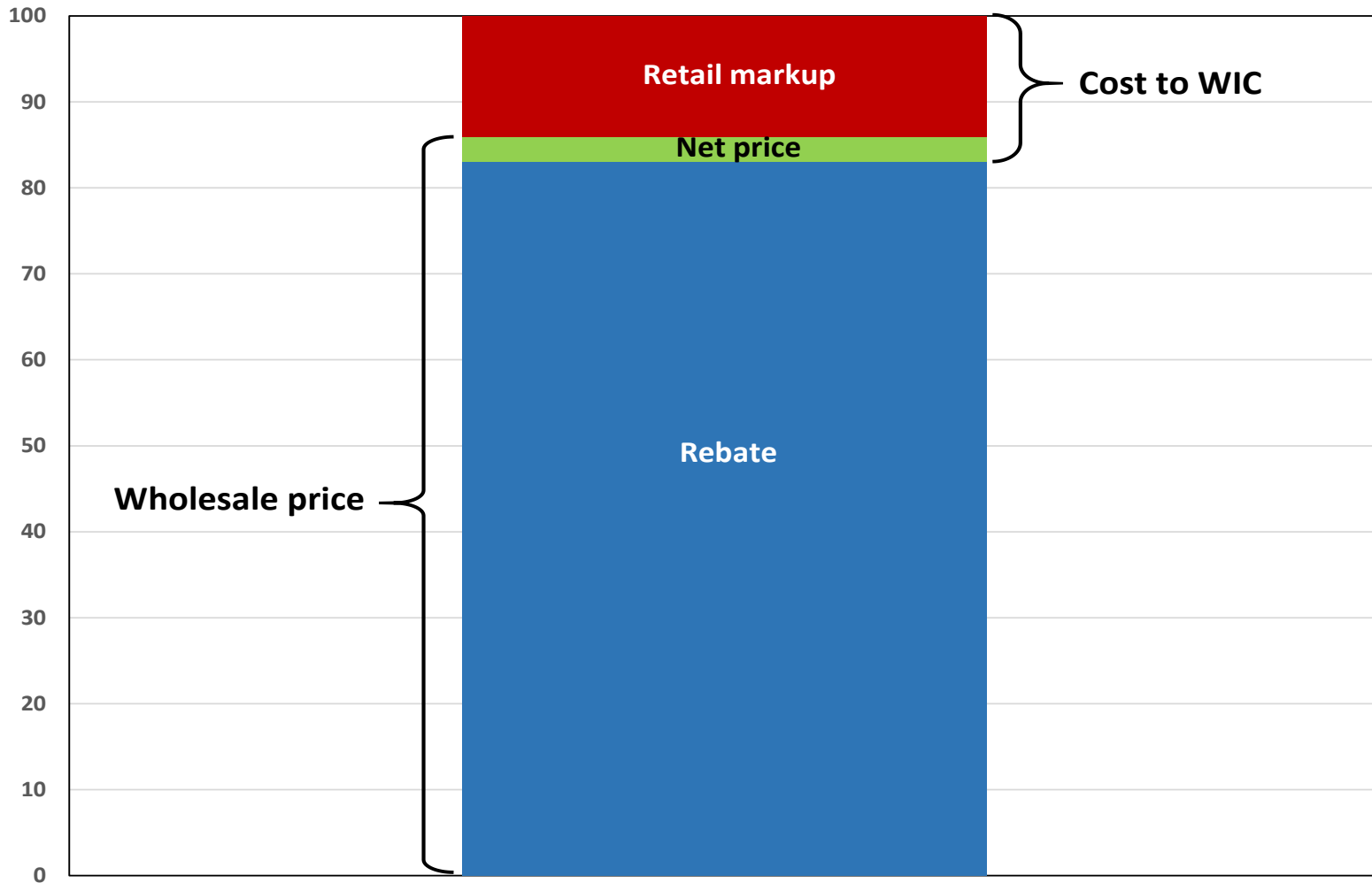
# Ongoing Research at ERS-cont.

## WIC and the Retail Markup of Infant Formula



# Example of cost components for a can of infant formula in WIC

Percent of retail cost



# Ongoing Research at ERS-cont.

## WIC and the Retail Markup of Infant Formula

- How big is the retail markup for the WIC brand of formula?
- Do retailers charge a larger markup for the WIC brands of formula?



# Duke-UNC BECR Center

- Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR)
- Collaboration between Duke and U. of North Carolina
- Funded jointly by ERS and FNS
- Draws on research from economics and cognitive psychology to better understand consumer behavior and decision making
- Conducts research on ways to promote healthy and cost-effective food choices by WIC participants
- Session on “Improving the Retail Experience Using Behavioral Economics and EBT Data” in Philadelphia



# For more information:

- ERS Food Assistance Research Report Database:  
<https://data.ers.usda.gov/FANRP-research-reports-articles-database.aspx>  
(Under “Topics,” click on “WIC”)
- BECR Center: <https://becr.sanford.duke.edu/>
- Vic Oliveira: [Victoro@ERS.USDA.GOV](mailto:Victoro@ERS.USDA.GOV)

