

The Food Stamp Program

Overview

The Food Stamp Program is a nutrition program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service and administered by the states. The program helps low-income individuals and families buy food and provides nutrition education to help recipients choose foods that enhance their health and well-being

Basic Eligibility Rules

The Food Stamp program is means-tested; i.e., there are two income standards: gross and applied. The gross income limit is 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL), which, for example, is \$1,861 monthly for a family of three. The applied income limit (amount of income left after allowable deductions) is equal to the FPL (\$1,431 monthly for a family of three). Households whose total income exceeds these limits are not eligible.

There is an asset limit of \$2,000. The Department of Social Services (DSS) does not count the home one lives in or any motor vehicles owned by the household toward that limit.

There are also many other assets that are excluded, such as essential household items and personal effects.

Households that include an elderly or persons with a disability are not subject to the gross income limit - only the applied income limit - and have a higher asset limit of \$3,000.

Applicants whose income is less than \$150 per month and whose assets are less than \$100, or whose expenses exceed their income, are

qualified to receive Food Stamps within seven calendar days from the date of their application. Other eligible households must have their benefits provided within 30 days.

Benefit Information

The amount of Food Stamps for which a household is eligible depends on the number of people in the household, the total applied income of the household and the household's expenses for shelter and utilities, childcare, child support and medical expenses for people with disabilities and/or elderly members of the household. The amount of the benefit is based on the assumption that a family will spend 30% of its income on food. The benefit is therefore calculated by subtracting 30% of the countable income from the federal Thrifty Food Plan standard. The Thrifty Food Plan is currently \$162 for one person, \$298 for two, and \$426 for a three-person household.

DSS provides Food Stamp benefits through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), and deposits benefits into each Food Stamp household's account each month and provides the household with the EBT card that they take to the grocery store to buy food. Most grocery stores accept Food Stamps and currently 18 farmers' markets are participating.



Who We Serve

As of June 1, 2007, we provided federal Food Stamps to 104,410 households. Those households were comprised of 195,111 individuals, including 78,326 children. The average monthly benefit was \$182.39. We also serve about 150 people under the State-Funded Food Stamp Program.

The Food Stamp Program

Citizenship and Documented Non-Citizen Requirement

Generally, Food Stamps recipients must be U.S. citizens, although documented non-citizens may be eligible in certain circumstances. (An example would be a documented non-citizen who has lived in the U.S. for five or more years.) For those documented non-citizens who are not eligible for the federal food stamp program solely because of their citizenship status, Connecticut administers a **State-Funded Food Stamp** Program.

Payment Accuracy

Because the federal government provides funding for the food stamp program, it closely monitors states to ensure that they give eligible people the correct benefit amount through a formal quality control program. In 2004, Connecticut's error rate was 4.94%, which was under the national average. We have managed to remain under or near the national average since then. Governor Rell recently received a letter from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, congratulating DSS for obtaining both a payment error rate and a negative error rate below the national average.

Modernization

DSS has begun an initiative to create an internet-based online application process. Food Stamp applicants will be able to file an application from any personal computer with Internet capability. Applicants will still need to be interviewed by an eligibility worker, but for some people this could be done by phone.

Nutrition Education

USDA matches local and state money spent on nutrition education activities. Each state submits a formal plan that has to be reviewed and approved

by USDA. DSS receives approximately \$2 million per year and contracts with the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Department of Public Health to conduct nutrition education activities. They conduct these activities for children and parents at schools and agencies in the community.

Food Stamp Employment & Training

The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides money to each state to provide employment and training services for food stamp recipients with the primary target being Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents. These adults are only eligible for Food Stamp benefits for three months unless they meet a work requirement. One of the ways they can meet that requirement is by participating in the Food Stamps Employment & Training program.

Improving Participation

To ensure that states serve as many people who are eligible for food stamps as possible, the USDA matches state and local money spent on outreach activities to people who are within the income and asset limits but who have not applied for Food Stamps. DSS contracts with several non-profit agencies to conduct outreach activities throughout the state. The USDA also conducts outreach activities.



The Food Stamp Program

Emergency Food Assistance

In the case of a disaster, DSS collaborates with other agencies in the state to ensure food availability, through mass feeding sites, commodities distribution and Food Stamp benefits with pre-activated electronic cards. In addition, The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provide funds to ensure commodities distribution of high protein food to soup kitchens and food banks. These programs, in Federal Fiscal Year 2006, allowed Connecticut to receive 1.2 million pounds of food valued at \$1 million and to serve the equivalent of approximately 450,000 meals through a statewide network of 600 agencies.

Connecticut Food Policy Council

The DSS Commissioner's designee also serves on the Connecticut Food Policy Council, a group mandated by the Connecticut General Assembly to study all issues related to food, such as growing it on Connecticut farms, processing and distributing it safely, and ensuring that all residents have access to enough food to eat through programs such as Food Stamps and the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program administered by the State Department of Education. In addition, the Council promotes healthier eating choices. The Council is responsible for making recommendations to the Governor about issues involving food. A recent example of government involvement in healthy



eating choices was the bill passed that regulated when soda could be sold in schools.

For more information about the Council, follow this link: www.foodpc.state.ct.us

How to Apply

You can get an application at your local Department of Social Services (DSS) office, call to have one mailed to you, or get one through the Internet at www.ct.gov/dss on our "Publications" page.

To see this and other "Issue Brief" topics on the web, go to www.ct.gov/dss and follow the link for Publications

For more information on Food Stamps, Call 1-800-842-1508, or visit our website at www.ct.gov/dss and click on "Programs and Services," scroll down to "Food Stamps"

For more information on any Issue Brief Publication, email Public & Government Relations at pgr.dss@ct.gov