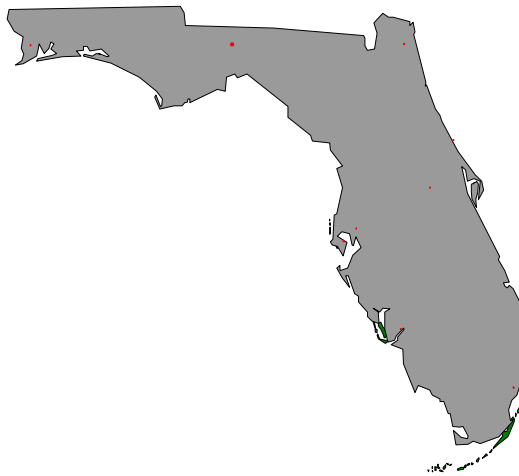


# FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

## FACT SHEET



ACCESS staff in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) prepared this Fact Sheet to give a general description of the Food Stamp Program. DCF determines eligibility for public assistance programs in Florida. State Statute, Administrative Rule and federal regulations contain specific eligibility policy. Note: Eligibility standards are subject to change during October of each year.



**October, 2009**

# Food Stamp Program

## **Program Description**

The Food Stamp Program helps low-income people buy food they need for good health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals determines the amount of food stamp benefits an individual or family receives. Food stamp benefits are a supplement to a family's food budget. Households may need to spend some of their own cash, along with their food stamp benefits, to buy enough food for a month. Refer to this USDA brochure for an explanation about how food stamp benefits can help a family eat better:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/Translations/English/313Brochure-08.pdf>.

## **Household Status**

Individuals who buy and cook food together are one household for food stamp purposes and must have their eligibility determined as a group. There are situations where we must include individuals in the same household, regardless of how they buy and cook their food. Examples include parents and children under age 22, adults exercising parental control over minors in the home, and spouses.

## **Residence/Citizenship**

An individual must be a resident of Florida to receive food stamp benefits in Florida. An individual must either be a U.S. citizen or meet specific qualified noncitizen criteria. Noncitizens are not eligible for food stamp benefits until they provide acceptable proof of a qualified noncitizen status. Noncitizens who do not want DCF to verify their noncitizen status have the option of withdrawing their application or allowing the other household members to participate without that member.

## **Social Security Numbers**

Individuals, including children, applying for food stamp benefits, must either provide a social security number, or proof they have applied for a social security number. Individuals in the household not applying for food stamp benefits do not have to supply a number or apply for a social security number.

## **Child Support Cooperation/Child Support Payment Requirements**

Parents or relatives applying for food stamp benefits for dependent children, who have absent parent(s), must cooperate with the state's Child Support Enforcement office to establish paternity and obtain child support for the children. Failure to cooperate, without good cause, results in removal of the individual from the food stamp benefits.

Individuals applying for food stamp benefits, who are court ordered to pay child support for children under age 18, not living with them, may receive a deduction for the child support payments in the food stamp budget.

## **Work/Work Registration**

Physically and mentally fit adults between 16 and 60 years old must register for work, accept offers of suitable work, and take part in an employment and training program when referred, if they do not meet an exemption. These healthy adults age 18 to 50 years old who do not have dependent children or are not pregnant can only receive food stamp benefits for three months in a three-year period if they are not working or participating in a work or workfare program if Food Stamp Employment and Training services are available in their area of residence.

## **Income**

The Food Stamp Program counts most types of income to see if a household is eligible. A household must have total gross monthly income less than or equal to 130% of the federal poverty level and total net monthly income less than or equal to 100% of the federal poverty level to be eligible for food stamp benefits. Gross income means a household's total income before deductions, not counting money we can exclude. Net income means gross income minus allowable deductions. Elderly/disabled households only have to meet the net income standard. The "Income Chart" below shows the Gross and Net Income limits and the benefit amounts for the number of people in the household.

**Income Chart**

<b>People in Household</b>	<b>Gross Monthly Income Limits 10/09</b>	<b>Net Monthly Income Limits 10/09</b>	<b>Maximum Benefit Amount 04/09</b>
1	\$1,174	\$ 903	\$200
2	\$1,579	\$1,215	\$367
3	\$1,984	\$1,526	\$526
4	\$2,389	\$1,838	\$668
5	\$2,794	\$2,150	\$793
6	\$3,200	\$2,461	\$952
7	\$3,605	\$2,773	\$1,052
8	\$4,010	\$3,085	\$1,202
For Each Additional Person Add	+\$406	+\$312	\$150

## **Deductions**

Deductions are expenses that we subtract from the household's gross income when determining the amount of the food stamp benefits for a month. The food stamp deductions include:

- 20% deduction from earned income,
- Standard deduction of \$141 for households with 1-3 members,
- Standard deduction of \$153 for a household with 4 members,
- Standard deduction of \$179 for a household with 5 members,
- Standard deduction of \$205 for a household with 6 or more members,
- Cost of child care when needed to work, seek work or attend training for work,
- Medical expenses more than \$35 for elderly or disabled household members,
- Court ordered child support payments paid to non-household members, or
- A portion of shelter and utility costs.

## **Assets**

Households may have \$2,000 in countable assets or if at least one person is age 60 or older or disabled they may have \$3,000 in countable assets. Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income or Temporary Cash Assistance automatically meet the asset limit. Some assets that do not count are:

- Home and surrounding property,
- Household goods and personal effects,
- One burial plot per household member,
- Cash value of life insurance policies, and
- Vehicles.

## **Students**

Most able-bodied students, ages 18 through 49 enrolled in college or other institutions of higher education at least half time, are not eligible for food stamp benefits. However, students may be able to get food stamp benefits if they are:

- Physically or mentally unfit,
- Receiving Temporary Cash Assistance benefits,
- Participating in a state or federally financed work study program,
- Enrolled in college as a result of participation in a Job Opportunities and Basic Skill program under Title IV of the Social Security Act,
- Work at least 20 hours per week,
- Participating in an on-the-job training program,
- Taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 6,
- Taking care of a dependent household member over the age of 5 but under 12 and do not have adequate child care to enable them to attend school and work a minimum of 20 hours, or to take part in a state or federally financed work study program, or
- Single parent enrolled full time in college and taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12.

## **Foods You Can Buy With Food Stamp Benefits**

Households **can** use food stamp benefits to buy:

- Breads and cereals;
- Fruits and vegetables;
- Meats, fish, and poultry;
- Dairy products; and
- Seeds and plants to grow and produce food for the household to eat.

Households **cannot** use food stamp benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco;
- Pet food, soaps, paper products, or household supplies;
- Vitamins and other medicines;
- Food that will be eaten in the store; and
- Hot foods.