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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food and  
Nutrition  
Service

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Center Drive

Alexandria, VA  
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**SUBJECT:** Food Stamp Program – Fiscal Year 2009 Target Areas for State Agency Operations Reviews and Management Evaluations

**TO:** Regional Administrators  
All Regions

In preparation for the next FY, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has identified critical program areas to be monitored during FY 2009 for the successful operation of the FSP nationwide. The national target areas listed below are to be included in FY 2009 State Agency Operations Reviews (SAORs) conducted by FNS regional offices. In addition, State agencies must include these target areas, as applicable, when conducting Management Evaluations (MEs) at local offices.

#### **National Target Areas**

1. Program Access
2. Corrective Action Assessment
3. Recipient Claims Management
4. Nutrition Education
5. State ME Systems
6. Employment and Training – Innovative Financing
7. Online Application Processing
8. Call Centers/Change Centers

#### **Rationale for Selection of FY 2009 Target Areas**

Regional offices and program divisions at headquarters provided input in the selection of these target areas. Most of the target areas listed above represent a continuation from previous FYs; however, there are a few changes for FY 2009. Based on comments received, we dropped EBT/Issuance Systems, a target area for the last several years, and added two new review areas -- online application processing and call centers/change centers.

Unlike the other target areas, which focus on specific program areas for which regulatory requirements exist, online application processing and call centers/change centers represent methods of serving applicants/participants that many States have implemented as they modernize their FSP operations. The use of online applications and call centers is

increasing, resulting in a significant impact on clients' experience of the program. Even though regulatory standards do not exist, especially with regard to call centers/change centers, it is important to review the impact of these new methods from the standpoint of customer service and other applicable program requirements.

In addition to the national target areas, we encourage you to consider the specific operations of each State agency in determining whether other program areas, such as EBT/Issuance, should be reviewed. Please note that guidance for regional office FY 2009 local level Program Access Reviews, which are additional reviews required under COMPASS, will be provided shortly under a separate cover.

### **Guidance on Reviewing Target Areas**

State ME reviewers may not be familiar with how to review some of the target areas. The State agency may need to train State ME reviewers to conduct the review or assign expert staff to support the ME review team. Similarly, if reviewers at the FNS regional office are not familiar reviewing a target area, you may need to train reviewers to conduct the review or assign the review to other staff within the region who have the expertise. For example, financial management staff may monitor and review the financial area of a target, information technology staff may monitor and review an automated function, or civil rights staff may review an overlapping client services target. It does not matter which staff conduct the review as long as the target areas are covered so problems are identified and corrected.

While these target areas are of the highest priority, there may be valid reasons not to review all eight target areas in each State. Some target areas may not be applicable in all States. In addition, you may determine that review of a particular target area is not necessary because it has been reviewed for two consecutive years, with no problems noted and no anticipated changes to the State's program operations in that area.

Except where local level site visits are required (ME and Nutrition Education), review of a target area may be conducted off-site if data is available at the regional office to ensure an adequate review. When determining whether or not to perform an on-site review, consider changes that put the State agency at risk for compliance problems such as recent staffing cuts, personnel changes, reduced budgets, policy changes, etc. Guidance for reviewing each target area is attached.

### **Reports of FNS Regional Office Review Activity**

As described below, reports on regional office FSP review activity for FY 2009 will be required.

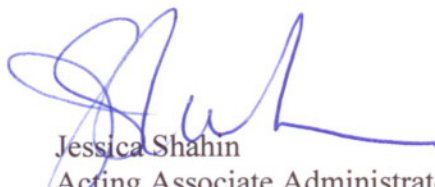
- Review Schedule  
The regional office schedule of review visits to States, including review type and coverage is due by January 1, 2009. Please include Program Access Reviews (PARs) to local offices in this schedule and indicate what targets will not be reviewed in each State, if known. Provide this information to the Program Development Division (PDD) (attention: John Knaus, Chief, Program Design Branch) and the Associate Administrator's Office for Program Service and Support (attention: Connie Slough, Special Assistant).
  
- Regional Office Summary of Review Activities  
This report, due November 30, 2009, summarizes your FY 2009 review activities conducted in each State. Address each applicable national target area, plus local level Program Access Reviews and any other program areas reviewed.

Please provide the following details for each State:

- Target Areas Reviewed (explain why you did not review a target area)
- Dates of Review
- Deficiency Description (Include an analysis of causes and estimated severity of impact on program operations, when possible.)
- Corrective Actions Taken/Planned
- Summary of Improvements noted in each State's program operations since the last review

PDD will provide additional instructions and reporting formats at a later date for compiling and submitting the Review Summary Report.

We appreciate the effort made by you, your staff, and your State agency partners to ensure the integrity of and improve access to the FSP. If you have any questions or require assistance, please contact John Knaus at (703) 305-2098.



Jessica Shahin  
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Food Stamp Program

Attachment