



USDA Food Stamp Program: Food Stamps Make America Stronger

The mission of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service is to increase food security and reduce hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people with access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

USDA's 15 nutrition assistance programs are the first line of our Nation's defense against hunger. The Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 budget requests \$60 billion for USDA nutrition assistance programs – a 76 percent increase since 2001. Overall, nutrition assistance programs represent 59 percent of the USDA's annual budget.

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is the Nation's first line of defense against hunger and the cornerstone of all Federal nutrition assistance programs. It provides benefits for the purchase of nutritious food to qualified low-income people and their families.

The FSP is the largest domestic nutrition assistance program. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service works with the States to administer the program, set national program standards and ensure the program operates effectively.

Nancy Montanez Johner
Under Secretary

Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
U.S. Department of Agriculture

- The FSP serves approximately 1 in 11 Americans every month.
- 67 percent of those eligible for the Food Stamp Program (FSP) participated in 2006, up from 65 percent in 2005 and 54 percent in 2001. This demonstrates continued growth in the proportion of eligible people participating for the fourth consecutive year.
- Over 10 million children and low-income people have been added to the program since 2001 and we continue to promote FSP participation aggressively among eligible people.
- America invested \$34.9 billion in the FSP in FY 2008.
- Currently, over 27.7 million low-income people benefit from the FSP every month.
- The FSP has record high payment accuracy -- with an impressive 94.36 percent benefit accuracy rate for FY 2007. All but 2 percent of food stamp participants are eligible for some benefit.

The Food Stamp Program is an investment in our future.

- About half of the food stamp participants are children.
- According to a 2002 study, among food stamp households with school-age children, 88 percent received a free or reduced-price lunch and 68 percent received a free or reduced-price breakfast. Among those with children under age 5, 64 percent participated in WIC.

The Food Stamp Program is designed to maximize and enhance food purchasing power.

- The Food Stamp Program is a program that supplements the food purchasing power of low-income Americans. The average time a food stamp recipient stays on the program is 9 months.
- In 2005, 6.5 million recipients received the maximum benefit for their family; 671,000 recipients received the minimum benefit.
- In FY 2001, 17.3 million people recipients received a total of \$16.0 billion in benefits. In FY 2008, average monthly participation increased to more than 27.7 million people and benefits totaled more than \$31.8 billion – an increase of 60 percent in participants and 99 percent in benefits during that period.
- The FSP also provides emergency food assistance to disaster victims through shelters and relief



The Food Stamp Program is an investment in our future. Eating healthier helps children have the energy they need to learn and grow.

organizations, and directly to households. In FY 2006, FNS provided almost \$740 million in disaster food stamp assistance to disaster victims.

- Benefits are distributed via electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, a special kind of debit card that can be used in 162,000 authorized retail stores nationwide.

Benefitting People

In addition to improving health and nutrition, the FSP provides crucial support to needy households and to those making the transition from welfare to work. In fact, nearly 30 percent of participating food stamp households have earnings.

- Households with children receive over 75 percent of all food stamp benefits.
- 23 percent of households include a disabled person and nearly 18 percent of households include an elderly person.
- The FSP increases household food spending, and the increase is greater than what would occur with an equal benefit in cash.

Benefitting Communities

The FSP supports State and local communities by boosting their economies.

- Every \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates almost twice as much (\$9.20) in total community spending.
- If the national participation rate rose just 5 percent, 1.9 million more low-income people would be able to spend an additional \$1.3 billion on healthy food. This would generate **\$2.5 billion in new economic activity** nationwide.

Always Reaching Out

There are many reasons that eligible people do not participate in the FSP, including lack of information, lack of accessibility, language barriers, and the stigma that some associate with food stamps. FNS is making great efforts to ensure that all eligible people, particularly seniors, legal immigrants and the working poor, are aware of and have access to the benefits they need and deserve.

FNS continues its commitment to reach all those eligible for food stamps by working with and through partners on all levels – Federal, State and especially the local level. Partners include food banks, anti-hunger organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, individuals, employers, and State and local governments.



FNS supports its partners and has developed many targeted resources to improve awareness of and access to critical nutrition benefits.

- “Food Stamps Make America Stronger” is an FNS ongoing national educational campaign to reach key target populations – the working poor, seniors, and legal immigrants. The campaign includes radio advertising; National and State toll-free numbers; and posters, flyers, brochures and other materials. Resources are available in English and Spanish.
- In FY 2006, FNS awarded more than \$1 million to 15 faith- and community-based organizations to conduct food stamp outreach. In FY 2007, FNS awarded an additional \$1 million to another 14 organizations.
- In 2006, FNS awarded a total of \$5 million to five States through the program to help increase access. The FSP also awarded \$18 million to States for improving access and increasing program participation through performance bonuses.
- Three outreach tool kits designed for State and local food stamp offices, faith- and community-based partners, and retailers are available on the FNS website:
www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach.

Food Stamp Nutrition Connection

Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) plays an increasing role in helping low-income families make healthy food choices within a limited budget, and pursue a physically active lifestyle consistent with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid. Through FSNE, food stamp recipients and eligibles can learn to make wise food choices.

- FSNE promotes consumption of more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat free or low-fat milk products, lean meats, poultry and fish, daily physical activity, and energy balance.
- Education campaigns such as Eat Smart, Play Hard are designed to convey messages in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid to low-income mothers and children.
- The Food Stamp Nutrition Connection is a valuable resource for nutrition educators and includes materials, information on the latest research, a chat forum and other useful features, including a recipe finder database: <http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov/>.

Who Is Eligible?

Most American citizens or legal immigrants with little income and few resources can receive nutrition assistance through the FSP. Eligibility depends on the total income and expenses within a household.

Most food stamp households must have a monthly gross income equal to or less than 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, and all must have a monthly net income equal to or less than 100 percent of the poverty guidelines.

- The FSP allows deductions from income such as housing costs, child support, medical expenses and childcare costs.
- Households may have up to \$2,000 in assets. Households with an elderly or disabled person may have up to \$3,000 in assets. Homes and many vehicles are not counted toward the asset limit.

For additional information, please contact your local food stamp office. Consult the yellow pages of a phone book under the heading “Social Services” or “Human Services,” log on to www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/, or call 1-800-221-5689. Assistance is available in English and Spanish.

USDA offers a pre-screening tool in both English and Spanish called Food Stamps Step1, a fast and effective way to determine whether an applicant may be eligible for FSP benefits and estimate monthly benefits.

For more information log on to www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach