



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Food and
Nutrition
Service

3101 Park
Center Drive
Alexandria, VA
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DATE: February 15, 2005

SUBJECT: Food Stamp and Child Nutrition Agreements for Direct Certification

TO: Regional Administrators
All Regions

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires that children in food stamp households be directly certified for free school meals. To prepare for the phased in implementation of mandatory direct certification, which begins for the largest school districts in July 2006 and covers all school districts by July 2008, we convened a work group on January 26–27, 2005. Meeting attendees included Federal, State and local administrators of the school meal programs, along with Federal and State Food Stamp Program administrators. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss implementation issues surrounding direct certification and optional direct verification as a result of the new provisions.

To facilitate mandatory direct certification, the law requires Food Stamp and Child Nutrition State agencies to enter into agreements by July 1, 2005. The affected State agencies should be working together now to discuss direct certification and get these agreements in place. While we anticipate the Child Nutrition State agency will initiate contact with the Food Stamp State agency, the law makes both agencies responsible for making mandatory direct certification a reality. The agreements must include, at a minimum, a statement that direct certification will take place when required by law, as well as agreement to develop detailed procedures well in advance of implementation. Based on a recommendation from the work group, we are developing a checklist of items for the direct certification agreements, which we plan to provide in March 2005.

We are asking you to contact each of your States to obtain information on the status of their actions intended to implement the direct certification provisions, and provide a State-by-State status report to Stan Garnett by May 2, 2005. Since direct certification of children in food stamp households has been optional for more than a decade, States may have some form of an agreement already in place. However, we expect that many, if not all, of these agreements will need to be updated to reflect the new provisions of the law and the advances in technology since they were originally signed.

Please make every effort to facilitate the cooperative relationship between your Child Nutrition and Food Stamp State agencies in implementing the mandatory direct certification provision in accordance with the law. Let us know of any assistance that

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we can provide to you in this process. If you have any questions, contact Stan Garnett at 703-305-2590 for Child Nutrition issues, and Art Foley at 703-305-2490 for Food Stamp issues.



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JESSICA SHAHIN
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