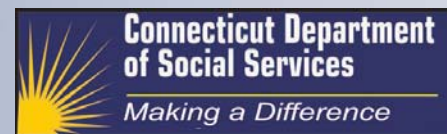


Issue Brief

Issue#1
Updated June 2009



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Overview

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as 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

SNAP is a means-tested program, which means there are income and asset limits.

For most households, the gross income limit is 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL). For example, the limit is \$2,823 monthly for a family of three. There is no applied income limit and no asset test.

The rules are different for households in which at least one member is elderly (aged 60 or older) or receiving disability income. For these households there is no gross income limit. However, if the household's gross income limit is more than 185% of FPL, there is an applied income limit (the FPL) and an asset limit (\$3,000). The Department of Social Services does not count the home one lives in or any motor vehicles the household owns. The department also does not count many other assets such as retirement accounts, essential household items and personal effects.

There is no asset limit for households whose gross income is less than or equal to 185% of FPL.

Applicants whose income is less than \$150 per month and whose assets are

less than \$100, or whose rent/mortgage and utility expenses exceed their income, are qualified to receive SNAP benefits 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 the SNAP benefit 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, dependant care, 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 \$200 for one person, \$367 for two, and \$526 for a three person household.

DSS provides SNAP benefits through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT). DSS deposits benefits into each SNAP 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 SNAP benefits and currently many farmers' markets are participating.

Who We Serve

As of May 1, 2009, we provided federal SNAP benefits to 131,296 households. Those households were comprised of 240,599 individuals, including 93,133 children. The average monthly benefit for FFY '08 was \$195. We also serve about 150 people under the State-Funded SNAP.



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Citizenship and Documented Non-Citizen Requirement

Generally, SNAP 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 SNAP solely because of their citizenship status, Connecticut administers a **State-Funded SNAP**.

Payment Accuracy

Because the federal government provides funding for SNAP, it closely monitors states to ensure that they give eligible people the correct benefit amount through a formal quality control program.

Modernization

DSS has begun an initiative to create an internet-based online application process. SNAP 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 will receive close to \$3 million for FFY '09 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.

SNAP Employment & Training

The U.S. department of Agriculture provides money to each state to provide employment and training services for SNAP recipients.

Improving Participation

To ensure that states serve as many people who are eligible for SNAP 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 SNAP. DSS contracts with several non-profit agencies to conduct outreach activities throughout the state. The USDA also conducts outreach activities.



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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 SNAP benefits with preactivated electronic cards. In addition, The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program and SNAP provide funds to ensure commodities distribution of high protein food to soup kitchens and food banks. These programs, in Federal Fiscal Year 2008, allowed Connecticut to receive 2,659,722 pounds of food valued at \$1,596,775 and to serve the equivalent of approximately 997,000 meals through a statewide network of 600 agencies.



Connecticut Food Policy Council

The DSS Commissioner's designee 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 SNAP 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.

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 the Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program, or visit our website at www.ct.gov/dss and click on "programs and Services", scroll down to "Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program".

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