

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT FOOD STAMPS

What are Food Stamps? The Food Stamp Program helps people buy food. The amount of Food Stamps you get is based on your income. You do not have to get other public assistance to get Food Stamps.

Who can use Food Stamps? You can get Food Stamps if you buy and cook food for yourself or your family. You do not have to have your own address; you can share a place with someone else. Food Stamps are given to “households.” A household can be one person or a group of people who buy food and make meals together. You are eligible for Food Stamps if you are doing 30 hours of a work activity each week (or you have an exemption from work requirements) and you meet income and asset tests.

What is the income limit?

Regular Households		Elderly Disabled Households	
Household Size	Gross Monthly Income	Household Size	Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,107	1	\$1,404
2	\$1,484	2	\$1,883
3	\$1,861	3	\$2,361
4	\$2,238	4	\$2,840
Add'l Members	\$377 each	Add'l Members	\$479 each

APPLYING FOR FOOD STAMPS

How can I get Food Stamps? Fill out an application with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). You can get the application by calling 1-800-254-4202 or by stopping into your local HHS office. If you need help filling out your application, you can fill out just the first page and turn it in to get started. After you hand in your application, you will need to do an interview to make sure the information on your application is correct. A new on-line application system called ACCESS Nebraska will soon be available – ask HHS if this is an option for you!

What should I bring to the interview?

When you are setting up your interview with your caseworker, ask what documents you need to bring with you. Generally, you will want to bring:

- proof of identification for each person in your food stamp household;
- pay stubs or other proof of income;
- proof of your expenses, such as utility bills, rent or mortgage receipts, and proof of child care expenses;
- bank statements;

- any other paperwork your caseworker asks for

What if I cannot get into the office for the interview? You may be allowed to complete a telephone interview if you are elderly, disabled, currently receiving ADC, or face certain hardships such as: illness, transportation difficulties, care of a household member, living in a very rural area, ongoing severe weather, or work or training hours that prevent you from participating in an in-office interview. In some cases, you may be able to send someone else in your place. You can call the food stamp office for more information.

How much might I get? The average food stamp amount is about \$86 per person per month.

Maximum Food Stamp Allotment	
Household Size	Maximum Allotment
1	\$162/month
2	\$298/month
3	\$426/month
4	\$542/month
Amounts increase with each additional household member.	

What if I need food right away? You should call 211 to learn about help with food in your area. You may also be able to get faster “Expedited Service” if your household has less than \$150 in gross monthly income and you do not have more than \$100 in cash or savings. If this is the case for you, ask your caseworker about how to get your Food Stamps more quickly. Food stamps are also sometimes available in cases of natural disasters.

QUALIFYING FOR FOOD STAMPS

To qualify for Food Stamps, your income and assets must fall within certain limits.

What kinds of things count as income? Income includes wages from a job and certain other work-related payments. Payments from assistance programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Assistance to the Aged Blind or Disabled (AABD), State Disability Program (SDP) or Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) also count. Retirement benefits and child support payments are also counted. Usually your gross (total) income is used.

Households in which all members receive or are approved to receive ADC, AABD, SDP or SSI payments are automatically or “categorically” eligible.

What if my income is irregular? If your work hours or income change often, your caseworker can look at your last few months of income. You should provide check stubs or other proof of your income for several months if you are able. If you recently had a change in work situation so that your income went up or down a lot, your caseworker may determine your income prospectively.

What is the asset limit? Will my house or car count? To be eligible, the value of your household’s assets (resources) cannot be more than \$2,000. For households that include members that are elderly or disabled, the asset limit is \$3,000. Generally, this includes money in a checking or savings account, savings certificates, stocks, bonds, and IRAs. It does not include your home, household goods, personal effects (such as jewelry), one licensed vehicle per household, or certain other exclusions. A second licensed vehicle may be allowed in some cases.

RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS

How are Food Stamps Delivered? The food stamp amount is put in an electronic account, which can be accessed with an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. The EBT card is a plastic card that works like a debit card and can be used at most grocery stores. You should be able to get your Food Stamps within 30 days.

What are some of my Rights in the Food Stamp Program? Every person has the right to apply for food stamp benefits and turn in a food stamp application. You have the right to have your information be treated confidentially within the Department of Health and Human Services. You should receive notices and information in a timely manner. You also have the right to be treated in a respectful way.

What are some of my Responsibilities in the Food Stamp Program?

All Food Stamp recipient households must provide accurate and complete information, provide documentation when asked, cooperate with quality control and audit processes, provide the caseworker with Social Security Numbers for those who are getting food stamps, and follow reporting requirements.

Do I need to work to get Food Stamps? Yes, you do need to work 30 hours a week to get Food Stamps. Each household member age 16 through 59 must work. But, some people are not required to meet work requirements; they include high school students of any age, people who physically or mentally cannot work, and persons age 60 and older. In some situations,

you may also count attending school as work. There are certain other exceptions as well.

What if I am unemployed? If you are someone who is required to work, you must sign a work registration form. You must then participate in the Employment and Training program. This program will provide job training and job search help. Your caseworker will give you information about this program.

What is recertification? How do I do it? Recertification means that you must confirm your information with your caseworker every six or twelve months, depending on your household, to show that you are still eligible for Food Stamps. You also need to inform your caseworker about changes (such as receiving a raise) as they happen.

FOOD STAMPS FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE

Did you know?

- If you currently do not have a home, you can get food stamps.
- If you are elderly or disabled you may fall under higher income eligibility categories and may be able to do an interview over the phone
- If you are a single adult ages 18-45 who are single you may receive Food Stamps for three months or more if you meet work requirements

I have been convicted of a crime - can I still get food stamps?

Most criminal convictions will not stop you from getting food stamps. But, there are three cases where a criminal history will prevent you from getting Food Stamps:

- 1) crimes that involved selling or misusing your Food Stamps,
- 2) fleeing felons are ineligible, and
- 3) certain drug-related crimes. If you have been convicted of selling drugs or have more than three convictions for drug possession, then you are permanently ineligible for the food stamp program. BUT, if you have less than three possession convictions and participate in a substance abuse treatment program, then you are still eligible.

Other members of your household may still apply for and get Food Stamps even if one member does not qualify because of a criminal history. The income of the person who does not qualify is still added to your household income.

I dont speak English - how might the Food Stamp Program work for me?

Applications are available in other languages. All paperwork will be given to you in your language and an interpreter will be available for free. A toll free information line is available in English and Spanish (1-800-221-5689.)

I am an immigrant - what do I need to know? There are special rules for immigrants. If you have questions about applying for food stamps, you should call Nebraska Appleseed at 1-800-845-3746 x 105.

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

What can I do if I have problems with the Food Stamp Program?

You can talk to your caseworker and your caseworker's supervisor. You may also ask your caseworker to go to mediation to work out disagreements. You may also appeal a decision you don't agree with. Mediation is a free service provided by a neutral outside person. You, your caseworker, and the mediator will sit down and talk about your concerns. An appeal is a formal review of a decision. You get an appeal form from the HHS office and fill it out to start the process. For more information, call the Nebraska Appleseed intake line at 1-800-845-3746 and ask for the Nebraska Appleseed Appeals and Mediation Brochure.

Where do I go for more information?

Contact the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services at 1-800-254-4202. If you have questions about your rights in the Food Stamp Program, you can call Nebraska Appleseed at: 438-8853 (in Lincoln) or 1-800-845-3746 (outside Lincoln.)

- **Do not assume your caseworker understands everything about Public Benefits.**
- **Ask questions.**
- **Do not sign anything without knowing what you are signing.**
- **Get and keep copies of what you sign and what you are sent in the mail.**

NEBRASKA APPLESEED CENTER
FOR LAW IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST
941 O Street, Suite 920 . Lincoln, NE 68508
402.438.8853 . Toll Free 1.800.845.3746
Fax: 402.438.0263
Email: info@neappleseed.org
www.neappleseed.org

Printed October 2008

Understanding Your Rights in the Welfare System

Basic Questions
& Answers About

FOOD STAMPS

To contact the
Nebraska Appleseed
Intake Line, call:

438-8853 ext. 105
(in Lincoln)

or 1-800-845-3746 ext. 105
(outside Lincoln)

CORE VALUES
COMMON GROUND
EQUAL JUSTICE



NEBRASKA
Appleseed