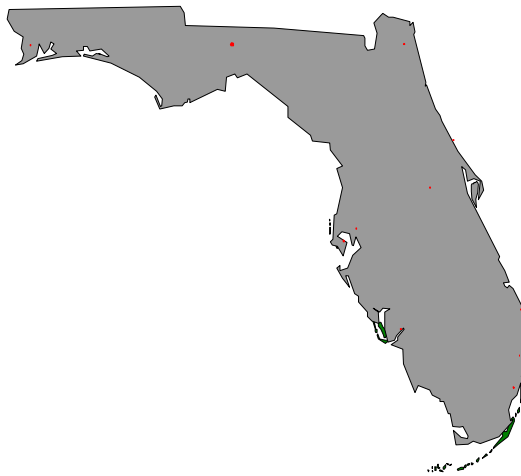


FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

FACT SHEET



ACCESS staff in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) prepared this Fact Sheet to give a general description of the Food Assistance Program. DCF determines eligibility for public assistance programs in Florida. State Statute, Administrative Rule and federal regulations contain specific eligibility policy. Note: Eligibility standards are subject to change during October of each year.



October, 2011

Food Assistance Program

Program Description

The Food Assistance Program helps low-income people buy food they need for good health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals determines the amount of food assistance benefits an individual or family receives. Food assistance benefits are a supplement to a family's food budget. Households may need to spend some of their own cash, along with their food assistance benefits, to buy enough food for a month. Refer to this USDA brochure for an explanation about how food assistance benefits can help a family eat better:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/Translations/English/313Brochure-08.pdf>.

Household Status

Individuals who buy and cook food together are one household for food assistance purposes and must have their eligibility determined as a group. There are situations where we must include individuals in the same household, regardless of how they buy and cook their food. Examples include parents and children under age 22, adults exercising parental control over minors in the home, and spouses.

Residence/Citizenship

An individual must be a resident of Florida to receive food assistance benefits in Florida. An individual must either be a U.S. citizen or meet specific qualified noncitizen criteria. Noncitizens are not eligible for food assistance benefits until they provide acceptable proof of a qualified noncitizen status. Noncitizens who do not want DCF to verify their noncitizen status have the option of withdrawing their application or allowing the other household members to participate without that member.

Social Security Numbers

Individuals, including children, applying for food assistance benefits, must either provide a social security number, or proof they have applied for a social security number. Individuals in the household not applying for food assistance benefits do not have to supply a number or apply for a social security number.

Child Support Cooperation/Child Support Payment Requirements

Parents or relatives applying for food assistance benefits for dependent children, who have absent parent(s), must cooperate with the state's Child Support Enforcement office to establish paternity and obtain child support for the children. Failure to cooperate, without good cause, results in removal of the individual from the food assistance benefits.

Individuals applying for food assistance benefits, who are court ordered to pay child support for children under age 18, not living with them, may receive a deduction for the child support payments in the food assistance budget.

Work/Work Registration

Physically and mentally fit adults between 16 and 60 years old must register for work, accept offers of suitable work, and take part in an employment and training program when referred, if they do not meet an exemption. These healthy adults age 18 to 50 years old who do not have dependent children or are not pregnant can only receive food assistance benefits for three months in a three-year period if they are not working or participating in a work or workfare program if Food Assistance Employment and Training services are available in their area of residence.

Income

The Food Assistance Program counts most types of income to see if a household is eligible. Households with a member disqualified for breaking Food Assistance Program rules, felony drug trafficking, running away from a felony warrant, or not participating in a work program must meet a gross income test at 130% of the FPL. Households without a disqualified member must pass a gross income limit at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Households with or without a disqualified member must meet a net income test at 100% of the FPL. Gross income means a household's total income before deductions, not counting money we can exclude. Net income means gross income minus allowable deductions. Elderly/disabled households only have to meet the net income standard. The "Income Chart" below shows the Gross and Net Income limits and the benefit amounts for the number of people in the household.

Income Chart

People in Household	200% Gross Monthly Income Limits 10/11	130% Gross Monthly Income Limits 10/11	100% Net Monthly Income Limits 10/11	Maximum Benefit Amount 04/09
1	\$1,815	\$1,180	\$ 908	\$200
2	\$2,452	\$1,594	\$1,226	\$367
3	\$3,088	\$2,008	\$1,545	\$526
4	\$3,725	\$2,422	\$1,863	\$668
5	\$4,362	\$2,836	\$2,181	\$793
6	\$4,998	\$3,249	\$2,500	\$952
7	\$5,635	\$3,663	\$2,818	\$1,052
8	\$6,272	\$4,077	\$3,136	\$1,202
For Each Additional Person Add	+\$636	+\$414	+\$319	\$150

Deductions

Deductions are expenses that we subtract from the household's gross income when determining the amount of the food assistance benefits for a month. The food assistance deductions include:

- 20% deduction from earned income,
- Standard deduction of \$147 for households with 1-3 members,
- Standard deduction of \$155 for a household with 4 members,
- Standard deduction of \$181 for a household with 5 members,
- Standard deduction of \$208 for a household with 6 or more members,

- Cost of child care when needed to work, seek work or attend training for work,
- Medical expenses more than \$35 for elderly or disabled household members,
- Court ordered child support payments paid to non-household members, or
- A portion of shelter and utility costs.

Assets

Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income or Temporary Cash Assistance or households without a disqualified member automatically meet the asset limit. Households with a member disqualified for breaking Food Assistance Program rules, felony drug trafficking, running away from a felony warrant, or not participating in a work program may have \$2,000 in countable assets or if at least one person is age 60 or older or disabled they may have \$3,250 in countable assets. Some assets that do not count are:

- Home and surrounding property,
- Household goods and personal effects,
- One burial plot per household member,
- Cash value of life insurance policies, and
- Vehicles.

Students

Most able-bodied students, ages 18 through 49 enrolled in college or other institutions of higher education at least half time, are not eligible for food assistance benefits. However, students may be able to get food assistance benefits if they are:

- Physically or mentally unfit,
- Receiving Temporary Cash Assistance benefits,
- Participating in a state or federally financed work study program,
- Enrolled in college as a result of participation in a Job Opportunities and Basic Skill program under Title IV of the Social Security Act,
- Working average number of hours that total 80 hours per month,
- Participating in an on-the-job training program,
- Taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 6,
- Taking care of a dependent household member over the age of 5 but under 12 and do not have adequate child care to enable them to attend school and work a minimum of 20 hours, or to take part in a state or federally financed work study program, or
- Single parent enrolled full time in college and taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12.

Foods You Can Buy With Food Assistance Benefits

Households **can** use food assistance benefits to buy:

- Breads and cereals;
- Fruits and vegetables;

- Meats, fish, and poultry;
- Dairy products; and
- Seeds and plants to grow and produce food for the household to eat.

Households **cannot** use food assistance benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco;
- Pet food, soaps, paper products, or household supplies;
- Vitamins and other medicines;
- Food that will be eaten in the store; and
- Hot foods.