

## FNS Pre-Screening Tool Help System

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### Help Topics

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**Adding Rows:** To add more rows to your screen, click on the small “plus” button next to the words “Add More Rows.” This button should appear at the bottom of the screen.

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**Age:** Please tell us the age of all the people in the household. If any child is less than a year old, enter 1. The rules for the food stamp allotment might depend on the ages of the people in the household.

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**Assets:** The word “assets” and the word “resources” mean things that you own. But for the Food Stamp Program, some of those things count as assets and other things do not.

1. Some things that count as assets or resources:
  - o Money that you have in cash or in checking or savings accounts
  - o Stocks
  - o Bonds
  - o Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs)
2. Some things that do not count as assets or resources:
  - o Your house and belongings
  - o A burial plot for each household member
  - o Retirement accounts such as 401 K, Railroad Retirement, or others
  - o Any asset that you cannot change into cash

Some examples of assets:

1. **Cash on Hand**  
Money that any household member carries with him or her, or keeps in the house.
2. **Checking Account or Savings Account**  
This account may be accessed through the bank or credit union by writing a check, using an automated teller machine ATM, or through debit cards. Savings accounts usually collect interest.
3. **Certificate of Deposit (CD)**  
An account in a bank or financial institution that has a set "maturity" date. At that time the money is paid back to you. CDs usually pay interest.
4. **Stock**  
An ownership share in a corporation. You can buy "shares" of stock in a corporation. Their value might go up or down depending on how well the corporation does.
5. **Savings Bonds**  
Money that you lend to the federal government. You might have a bond deduction where you work. You get paid back for the bond later, with "interest" paid back to you as the reward for the loan.
6. **Mutual Funds**  
Mutual funds are accounts set up with money deposited by a group of people. You can become one of them by investing. Usually, a minimum deposit of money is required, such as \$500. The money in the fund is used by a manager to invest in things the company thinks will make money.
7. **Keogh Plans**  
A pension or profit-sharing plan for self-employed people and their employees.
8. **Pension Funds**  
A retirement plan funded by an employer. Payments are made to retired employees for past services.
9. **Real Estate (besides your home)**  
If you own any land or buildings that you don't live in, these count as assets. But if you use this land to get income, that land doesn't count as an asset. However the income you get from that land counts as income.

Assets are important for determining if you can get food stamps. If you have a lot of assets, you are probably not eligible. For most households the limit is \$2000 in assets. But if you have a disabled person or a person over age 60 in your household, the limit is \$3000 for assets.

But if the assets you have don't count, you are still eligible. So if this pre-screening tool says you aren't eligible, you should still check with your local office to make sure. Maybe some of your assets don't count. Then you would be eligible.

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**Categorical Eligibility:** Some people get food stamps even if they don't meet the asset limit. Those people are called "categorically eligible." If you are one of these people, you get food stamps even if your assets are too high. But if your income is too high you might not get them.

You are categorically eligible if:

- All people in your household get TANF and/or SSI

You may also be categorically eligible if:

- You qualify based on other special rules in your state. If a student or alien lives in your household, and does not get TANF or SSI, you might still be categorically eligible. Remember to always check with your local food stamp office to make sure you are categorically eligible. The rules for categorical eligibility always depend on the state you live in."

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**Court-Ordered Child Support:** Court-ordered money you must pay to a child living outside the household. This money is required by law.

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**Child Support Amount:** In this space, you say how much you pay in court-ordered child support.

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**Citizenship / Immigrant:** If an immigrant has become a U.S. citizen, he or she has all the rights of a citizen who was born in America. The only exception is the person cannot be the President or Vice President of the United States. But in all countries the person is treated like any other American citizen.

**Citizen:** Usually you must be a U.S. citizen to get food stamps. But some people who are not U.S. citizens can also get food stamps. Some of them are automatically eligible. Others have to meet certain requirements. Some must wait before they become eligible.

Non-citizens who qualify automatically:

- Non-citizen nationals (people born in American Samoa or Swain's Island)
- American Indians born in Canada
- Non-citizen Indian tribe members, under Section 450b(e) of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act
- Members of Hmong or Highland Laotian tribes that helped the U.S. military during the Vietnam era, who are legally living in the U.S. Their spouses and children qualify too.

If you are not one of the people above, and you are not a citizen, you must be a "qualified alien" to get food stamps. Sometimes you might have to wait to get your food stamps. It depends on what kind of qualified alien you are.

Qualified aliens who are eligible with no waiting period:

- People granted asylum under Section 208 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA)
- Refugees admitted under section 207 of INA
- People with deportation withheld under 243(h) or 241(b)(3) of INA
- Cuban or Haitian entrants, as defined in 501(c) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980
- Amcrasian immigrants covered under 584 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and

Related Program Appropriations Act

- Any Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) with a military connection (a veteran, a person on active duty, or with a military spouse, parent or child)
- Anyone lawfully in the U.S. on 8/22/96, and currently under age 18. Once that person turns 18, he or she might no longer be eligible.
- Anyone lawfully in U.S. and 65 or older as of 8/22/96
- Anyone lawfully in the U.S. and receiving government payments for disability, or blindness

Qualified aliens who are eligible after a waiting period:

- Any LPR who has earned, or can be credited with, 40 quarters of work, or who has been a qualified alien for 5 years, whichever comes first
- A qualified alien in one of the following groups who has been in qualified status for 5 years:  
An LPR who has earned, or can be credited with, fewer than 40 quarters of work
  - A person paroled for at least one year under section 212(d)(5) of INA
  - A person granted conditional entry under 203(a)(7) of INA in effect prior to 4/1/80
  - A battered spouse, battered child or parent or child of a battered person with a petition pending under 204(a)(1)(A) or (B) or 244(a)(3) of INA

[For more information.](#)

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**Debt (Outstanding):** Any money that is owed on a loan. If you have not paid off your car or truck, you have an outstanding vehicle debt. If you put down the Outstanding Debt on the vehicle(s) you have, the pre-screening tool will calculate the vehicles' equity value.

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**Clear Rows:** If there are too many rows on a page, you can get rid of some of them by clicking on the "clear" link. You don't have to fill in all of the rows on any page of the pre-screening tool.

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**Dependent Care:** Care for a child or disabled adult so the person can go to school, go to work, or find a job.

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**Disabled:** A person is considered to be disabled for food stamp purposes if he or she:

- Receives Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) benefits

- Receives Social Security disability checks
- Receives Veterans disability benefits
- Receives any other government disability or retirement benefits available to people who are permanently disabled.

But even if you are not one of these people, you don't have to meet the food stamp work requirement if you are disabled. If you have a letter from a doctor saying you're disabled, you do not have to work to be eligible for food stamps.

Also, if a member of your household is physically disabled, and needs a vehicle to get around, that vehicle can be excluded from household assets. You need only a doctor's letter to prove that.

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**Earned Income:** Income from work. This can be wages or tips, and also the money you make if you are self-employed.

Types of Earned Income:

- **Wages:** Payment for services. Wages can be paid weekly, every two weeks, twice a month, monthly, etc.
- **Self-Employment:** If you are self-employed, you get money directly from your business, not from a wage or salary. (Examples of self-employment: you own a farm; sell Avon, Tupperware, etc.; have a roomer in your home.) Your income is the money you make, minus your business expenses.
- **Roomer:** Payments from a person who lives in a place you own and pays for a room only. (Deduct any expenses from this amount.)
- **Boarder:** Payments from a person who lives in a place you own and pays you for room and for meals. (Deduct any expenses from this amount.)
- **Job Training or Work Study:** Money you get as payment for work as a trainee or student
- **Strike Benefits:** Strike benefits are payments by a labor union to a member during a strike.

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**Expedited Service:** If your income and assets are very low, you can get "expedited service" for food stamps. That means you get your food stamps much faster than usual. After you apply for food stamps, you will normally get an answer within 30 days of applying. But if you qualify for expedited service, you will get them in 7 days or less.

-You can get expedited service if you meet ANY of these criteria:

-You have less income and savings this month than your shelter cost

-You have assets of less than \$100 and income less than \$150 per month

-You are a migrant or seasonal farm worker with less than \$100 in assets, and your last farm job is done. And, you won't get more than \$25 from your next job for 10 days after you apply for food

stamps.

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**First Name (on the Drop-Down Menu):** If you select a first name from the Drop-Down Menu, you can select that household member. Once you give the first names of household members, the names will be used throughout the Pre-Screening Tool to determine assets and other information for each member.

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**Fair Market Value (FMV):** The price you would expect to get if you were to sell your vehicle to a dealer. Note that this value is NOT necessarily the value you actually did sell it for. It is also NOT the amount you might be trying to sell it for. It is a set amount for every vehicle, and can be looked up using one of these web sites:

- Kelley Blue Book
- NADA Online

When you look up your vehicle at one of those sites, look for the trade-in or wholesale value. Once you have determined each vehicle's Fair Market Value, enter the amount for each vehicle in the appropriate field.

Then, enter the Outstanding Debt, if any, on the vehicle(s). The Pre-Screening Tool will calculate the Equity Value for you.

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**Back, Forward & Exit:** By moving the mouse over one of these buttons at the bottom of the form, you can go from one web page to another one. You can visit the last one you saw by clicking on "back," or move on by clicking "forward." You can close the page by clicking "exit."

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**Gross Amount:** Total amount before deductions, adjustments, or exemptions.

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**Gross Income:** Your total income before adjustments, deductions, or exemptions.

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**Homeless:** A person or household is homeless if it has no regular place to live. This includes individuals and families living in shelters. It also includes people doubled up with family or friends.

If you are homeless, you can get a shelter deduction even if you don't always have shelter. A shelter deduction is money that doesn't count as assets or income because you have to spend it on shelter. For most people it is rent, mortgage or utilities. In most states, homeless people get a shelter deduction of \$143 per month. That means you can subtract that from how much income you have.

For a list of the states that have this deduction, click [HERE](#).

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**Household:** A food stamp household is a person or a group of people living together who buy food and make meals together. The group does not need to be related. Sometimes people who live together count as one household, even if they do not buy and prepare meals together. For example: 1) spouses who live together, and 2) children under the age of 22 who live with a parent or stepparent, even if they have their own children.

If you live with other people, but they buy their own food and make their own meals, you may be able to apply for food stamps as a separate household. If you do this, you might get more benefits. This is because their income will not be added to your income in order to calculate the benefits you will get.

If someone is renting your home from you, that person is probably not in your food stamp household. This is true even if the person lives with you. The person is in your food stamp household only if he or she eats the same food you do. So a person who rents a room from you, but does not share meals with you, should apply as a separate household. If the person does so, both of you can get more benefits.

If you have any questions about who lives in the household, click on the help button next to this question. You can also call the state hotline number.

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**How Often:** This drop-down menu lets you choose a time period for how often you do something.

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**How did you learn about this tool?:** Select from the drop-down menu how you learned about this tool.

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**Medical Expenses - Amount:** Your total amount, as billed.

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**Medical Expenses & Types:** Medical expenses can include such items as

- Health Insurance premiums
- Insurance Co-Payments (the amount you pay out-of-pocket)
- Visits to a doctor or hospital
- Transportation to and from the doctor
- Eyeglasses prescribed by a doctor or optometrist
- Dentures, hearing aids, and prosthetics
- Prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines prescribed by a doctor
- Costs of service animals, like a seeing-eye dog
- Other out-of-pocket medical expenses that you can verify

Medical expenses are sometimes a “deduction” for the Food Stamp Program. That means that money you pay for these expenses doesn’t count as income or assets. If you pay medical expenses for someone who is older than 60 or gets disability payments, your medical expenses might be a deduction. This is only if you pay more than \$35 per month on medical expenses for the elderly and disabled people in your household. If you pay more than \$35 per month on medical expenses for other people in the household, that money is not a deduction. And if you have insurance or Medicaid that covers the expenses, none of these expenses is a deduction.

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**Medicaid:** A program to assist low-income people in getting and paying for medical care. Local departments of social or human services usually run the program.

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**Mortgage Insurance:** Insurance protecting a lender against loss from a mortgagor's default. The FHA or a private mortgage insurer issues it.

Enter the total amount for your mortgage insurance in the field below the question. If you do not pay mortgage insurance or rent, enter 0.

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**Real Estate Taxes:** Taxes assessed against real estate by a city, county, or state. The owner must pay



them.

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**Rent / Mortgage:**

- **Rent** - A payment a tenant makes to an owner of land or a building. The tenant then has a right to use that land or building, for a certain period of time.
- **Mortgage** - A transfer of real estate to make the person doing the transfer do something. Usually it is to make the person pay for the property. So if you mortgage your house to a bank you have to pay the bank for the house. When you finish paying the bank, you own the home.

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**Required Fields:** All required fields are marked with a red asterisk. You must answer those questions so the pre-screening tool can see if you may be eligible.

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**Seasonal/Migrant Farm Worker:** A migrant farm worker moves from one place to another to work in agriculture. A seasonal farm worker works for only part of the year in farm work, but lives in the same place all the time.

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**States:** To determine if you are eligible for food stamps, the pre-screening tool needs to know what state you are from.

Note: Food stamp rules can be different from state to state. How much you get, and whether you get it, depends on the state you live in.

If the pre-screening tool says you are not eligible, you should still check at the local food stamp office to make sure. This pre-screening tool is just an estimate. It does not use the special rules in your state. There is a possibility that you might be eligible in your state. The only way to know for sure is to apply at your local food stamp office. You can also contact a community organization, such as a food bank, that might know the rules in your state.

Here are the two-letter state abbreviations: Alabama (AL), Alaska (AK), Arizona (AZ), Arkansas (AR), California (CA), Colorado (CO), Connecticut (CT), Delaware (DE), District of Columbia (DC), Florida (FL), Georgia (GA), Guam, Hawaii (HI), Idaho (ID), Illinois (IL), Indiana (IN), Iowa (IA), Kansas (KS), Kentucky (KY), Louisiana (LA), Maine (ME), Maryland (MD), Massachusetts (MA), Michigan (MI), Minnesota (MN), Mississippi (MS), Missouri (MO), Montana (MT), Nebraska (NE), Nevada (NV), New Hampshire (NH), New Jersey (NJ), New Mexico (NM), New York (NY), North Carolina (NC),

North Dakota (ND), Ohio (OH), Oklahoma (OK), Oregon (OR), Pennsylvania (PA), Puerto Rico (PR), Rhode Island (RI), South Carolina (SC), South Dakota (SD), Tennessee (TN), Texas (TX), Utah (UT), Vermont (VT), Virgin Islands (VI), Virginia (VA), Washington (WA), West Virginia (WV), Wisconsin (WI), Wyoming (WY)

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**Survey:** Answer the questions about yourself and about the pre-screening tool by entering information on the right. This information will be used only for research. Your comments and suggestions are important to us.

This information is the only thing we save. You do not have to answer the survey. None of the information is personal or descriptive. Your answers will always be private. Your answers will help us provide better customer service.

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**Unearned Income:** Income from non-work sources like TANF, SSI, and Social Security. It also includes unemployment compensation, veterans' and other pension benefits, and child support payments. It even includes interest and dividends.

Types of Unearned Income:

- **Social Security Benefits:** Retirement benefits from the Social Security Administration. How much you get depends on how much you or your employer paid into the system when you worked.
- **Social Security for Disability:** Disability Insurance is often called Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). It is sometimes called Title II benefits. How much you get depends on how much you or your employer put into the system when you worked.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** Benefits paid by the Social Security system to some elderly and disabled people. Whether you get SSI depends on your income.
- **Railroad Retirement:** This is an insurance program for railroad workers. It gives old age benefits. It also pays insurance benefits for death, disability, unemployment and sickness.
- **TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families):** This is an assistance program for low-income people. It replaced the welfare programs AFDC and JOBS in 1996. How much you get depends on the state where you live.
- **Veterans Benefits:** If you are a veteran you can get more than 40 different benefit services. Your spouse and children can also get them if you die. You are not eligible if you got a Dishonorable Discharge.
- **Veterans' Monetary Benefits (Disability Compensation):** If you are disabled because of something that happened when you were in the military, you can get this benefit. How much you get depends on how badly you were injured. If you were dishonorably discharged, you are not eligible.
- **Worker's Compensation:** You get this benefit if you were injured while you were working on a job. You can also get benefits if your spouse is killed on the job.
- **Unemployment Compensation:** This insurance helps unemployed people while they look for

work. You have a right to get this insurance if you are unemployed. You do not need to demonstrate a need. If you were working and lost your job, you could apply for unemployment benefits.

- **Child Support:** This is money you get to support a child in your household. It might be money a court required someone to pay you. Or it might be money someone chooses to pay you. In both cases it counts as income. But if you pay the child support to someone else, because a court made you do so, that payment is a deduction for you. This is because you can't spend that money on food. However, if the person you pay it to applies for food stamps, it is income for that person.
- **Foster Care:** This is money you get to help raise a foster care child. If that child is in your household, it counts as income.

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**User (Who is Using the Tool?):** Pick the person using the tool from the menu.

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**Utilities:** Electricity, gas, water, trash collection, and sewer service are utilities. You might have to pay other utilities too. How much you pay for utilities can affect how much food stamp benefit you can get. Money paid for basic telephone service is also a utility deduction. Most states have a standard telephone deduction. Many states also allow a standard amount for utility costs to simplify the calculation of household shelter costs. This is called the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). Most states include telephone service in the Standard Utility Allowance. You can sometimes choose to use either the SUA or your real utility cost in your application, so you can pick the one that gives you a bigger deduction. This tool will automatically do this for you, to give you the best deduction.

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**Vehicle Purpose:** Say what you use each vehicle for. If you use a vehicle at your job, it doesn't count as an asset. But if you use it to get to work every day, it still counts as an asset. If you are unsure of whether your vehicle counts as an asset, call your local food stamp office.

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**Vehicle (Equity Value)** - This is calculated for you once you put down the Fair Market Value (FMV) of the vehicle.

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