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Title 7 —Agriculture

Subtitle B —Regulations of the Department of Agriculture

Chapter II —Food and Nutrition Service, Department of Agriculture

Subchapter B —General Regulations and Policies—Food Distribution

Part 253 Administration of the Food Distribution Program for Households on Indian Reservations

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PART 253—ADMINISTRATION OF THE FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM FOR HOUSEHOLDS ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

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§ 253.1 General purpose and scope.

This part describes the terms and conditions under which: USDA Foods (available under part 250 of this chapter) may be distributed to households on or near all or any part of any Indian reservation, the program may be administered by capable Indian tribal organizations (ITOs) and funds may be obtained from the Department for the costs incurred in administering the program. This part also provides for the concurrent operation of the Food Distribution Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on Indian reservations when such concurrent operation is requested by an ITO.

[89 FR 87254, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.2 Definitions.

Disabled member means a member of a household who:

- (1) Receives supplemental security income benefits under title XVI of the Social Security Act or disability or blindness payments under titles I, II, X, XIV, or XVI of the Social Security Act;
- (2) Receives federally- or State-administered supplemental benefits under section 1616(a) of the Social Security Act provided that the eligibility to receive the benefits is based upon the disability or blindness criteria used under title XVI of the Social Security Act;
- (3) Receives federally- or State-administered supplemental benefits under section 212(a) of Public Law 93-66;
- (4) Receives disability retirement benefits from a governmental agency because of a disability considered permanent under section 221(i) of the Social Security Act;
- (5) Is a veteran with a service-connected or non-service-connected disability rated by the Veteran's Administration (VA) as total or paid as total by the VA under title 38 of the United States Code;
- (6) Is a veteran considered by the VA to be in need of regular aid and attendance or permanently housebound under title 38 of the United States Code;
- (7) Is a surviving spouse of a veteran and considered by the VA to be in need of regular aid and attendance or permanently housebound or a surviving child of a veteran and considered by the VA to be permanently incapable of self-support under title 38 of the United States Code;
- (8) Is a surviving spouse or surviving child of a veteran and considered by the VA to be entitled to compensation for a service-connected death or pension benefits for a non-service-connected death under title 38 of the United States Code and has a disability considered permanent under section 221(i) of the Social Security Act. "Entitled" as used in this definition refers to those veterans' surviving spouses and surviving children who are receiving the compensation or pension benefits stated or have been approved for such payments, but are not yet receiving them;
- (9) Receives an annuity payment under: Section 2(a)(1)(iv) of the Railroad Retirement Act of 1974 and is determined to be eligible to receive Medicare by the Railroad Retirement Board; or section 2(a)(1)(v) of the Railroad Retirement Act of 1974 and is determined to be disabled based upon the criteria used under title XVI of the Social Security Act; or
- (10) Is a recipient of interim assistance benefits pending the receipt of Supplemented Security Income, a recipient of disability related medical assistance under title XIX of the Social Security Act, or a recipient of disability-based State general assistance benefits provided that the eligibility to receive any of these benefits is based upon disability or blindness criteria established by the State agency, which are at least as stringent as those used under title XVI of the Social Security Act (as set forth at 20 CFR part 416, subpart I, Determining Disability and Blindness as defined in Title XVI).

Elderly member means a member of a household who is sixty years of age or older.

Exercises governmental jurisdiction means the active exercise of the legislative, executive or judicial powers of government by an Indian tribal organization.

Food distribution program means a food distribution program for households on Indian reservations operated pursuant to sections 4(b) and 1304(a) of Pub. L. 95-113.

Indian tribal household means a household in which at least one household member is recognized as a tribal member by any Indian tribe, as defined in paragraph (d) of this section.

Indian Tribal Organization (ITO) means:

- (1) The recognized governing body of any Indian tribe on a reservation; or
- (2) The tribally recognized intertribal organization which the recognized governing bodies of two or more Indian tribes on a reservation authorize to operate SNAP or a Food Distribution Program on their behalf.

Indian tribe means

- (1) any Indian tribe, Band, or other organized Indian group, for example, a Rancheria, Pueblo, or colony, and including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation (established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (85 Stat. 688)), and that is on a reservation and recognized as eligible for Federal programs and services provided to Indians because of their status as Indians; or
- (2) any Indian tribe or Band on a reservation holding a treaty with a State government.

Overissuance means the dollar value of USDA Foods issued to a household that exceeds the dollar value of USDA Foods it was eligible to receive.

Reservation means the geographically defined area or areas over which an ITO exercises governmental jurisdiction so long as such area or areas are legally recognized by the Federal or a State government as being set aside for the use of Indians.

State means any one of the fifty States, the District of Columbia, and the reservation of an Indian tribe whose ITO meets the requirements of the Food Stamp Act of 1977 for participation as a State agency.

State agency means:

- (1) The agency of State government, including the local offices thereof, which enters into an agreement with FNS for the distribution of USDA Foods on all or part of an Indian reservation, and
- (2) The ITO of any Indian tribe, determined by the Department to be capable of effectively administering a Food Distribution Program, which enters into an agreement with FNS for the distribution of USDA Foods on all or part of an Indian reservation.
- (3) State agencies are also referred to as FDPIR administering agencies.

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979. Redesignated and amended by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982; 59 FR 1449, Jan. 11, 1994; 64 FR 73382, Dec. 30, 1999; 75 FR 4473, Jan. 28, 2010; 89 FR 87254, Oct. 31, 2024; 89 FR 104393, Dec. 23, 2024]

§ 253.3 Availability of USDA Foods.

- (a) **Conditions for distribution.** In jurisdictions where SNAP is in operation, there shall be no distribution of USDA Foods to households under the authority of any law, except that distribution may be made:
 - (1) On a temporary basis under programs authorized by law to meet disaster relief needs;
 - (2) For the purpose of the USDA Foods programs in accordance with the requirements of part 250 of this chapter and with other Federal regulations applicable to specific food assistance programs; and
 - (3) Whenever a request for concurrent or separate Food Distribution Program on a reservation is made by an ITO.

- (b) **Concurrent or separate food program operation.** Distribution of USDA Foods under the Food Distribution Program, with or without SNAP, shall be made whenever an ITO submits to FNS a completed application for the Food Distribution Program on all or part of a reservation and the application is approved by FNS.
- (1) Except as provided in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, when the Food Distribution Program is operating on all or part of a reservation, all eligible households within those boundaries may participate in the Food Distribution Program, or, if the ITO has elected concurrent operation of SNAP, may elect to participate in either program, without regard to whether the household is an Indian tribal household.
- (2) FNS may determine, based on the number of non-Indian tribal households located on all or part of a reservation, that concurrent operation is necessary. When such a determination has been made all households residing in such areas may apply to participate in either SNAP or the Food Distribution Program.
- (c) **Household distribution.** USDA Foods acquired under section 416 of the Agricultural Act of 1949, as amended; section 32 of Public Law 320, 74th Congress, as amended; section 709 of the Food and Agricultural Act of 1963, as amended; and section 4(a) of the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973, as amended, by section 1304 of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, may be made available under part 250 of this chapter for distribution to households in accordance with the provisions of that part and the additional provisions and requirements of this part.
- (d) **Food distribution program benefits.** Households eligible under this part shall receive a monthly food package based on the number of household members. The food package offered to each household shall consist of a quantity and variety of USDA Foods made available by the Department to provide eligible households with an opportunity to obtain a more nutritious diet and shall represent an acceptable nutritional alternative to SNAP benefits. The food package offered to each household by the State agency shall contain a variety of foods from each of the food groups in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations Monthly Distribution Guide Rates by Household Size. FNS shall periodically notify State agencies of the kinds of USDA Foods it proposes to make available based, insofar as practicable, on the preferences of eligible households as determined by the State agency. In the event one or more of the proposed USDA Foods cannot be delivered, the Department shall arrange for delivery of a similar USDA Foods within the same food group. FNS shall periodically assess how the USDA Foods provided in the Food Distribution Program compares to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the market baskets of the Thrifty Food Plan and, to the extent practicable, will adjust the food package as needed to ensure that the food package benefit is in alignment. The food package benefit will not decrease based on this adjustment.

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979. Redesignated by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982, as amended at 65 FR 47833, Aug. 4, 2000; 89 FR 87254, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.4 Administration.

- (a) **Federal administration.** Within the Department of Agriculture, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) shall be responsible for the Food Distribution Program. FNS shall have the power to determine the amount of any claim and to settle and adjust any claim.
- (b) **State agency administration.**

- (1) If FNS determines that the ITO is capable of effective and efficient administration, the ITO shall administer the Food Distribution Program on all or part of the reservation. If FNS determines that the ITO is not capable of effective and efficient administration of the Food Distribution Program, the appropriate agency of the State government shall be responsible for the Food Distribution Program on all or part of the Indian reservation. In addition, the appropriate agency of the State government may administer the Program on behalf of an otherwise capable tribe if agreed to in writing by both parties.
- (2) In the case where the Indian reservation boundaries cross State lines, the ITO and appropriate State agencies may jointly request FNS approval that a single State agency administer the Food Distribution Program on all or part of the Indian reservation.
- (3) An agency of State government responsible for administering the Food Distribution Program may delegate Program functions to an ITO. These functions include, but are not limited to, outreach, preparation of bilingual materials, USDA Foods issuance, determination of food preferences of households, publicizing uses of USDA Foods, and transportation and on-site delivery services. The State agency may also use the ITO in prescreening translations, interpretive services and other noncertification functions. The State agency shall not delegate responsibility for certification activities such as interviews or eligibility determinations with an ITO that has been determined incapable of administering the Food Distribution Program. In all cases the State agency shall retain full responsibility for program administration.

(c) ***Qualification as a reservation.***

- (1) The appropriate ITO of an established Indian reservation will qualify for participation under the provisions of this part, when that ITO files an application which demonstrates the status of an area as an established reservation, unless FNS determines that such area(s) does not qualify as a reservation as that term is defined in these regulations. For purposes of this part, established reservation means the geographically defined area(s) currently recognized and established by Federal or State treaty or by Federal statute whereby such geographically defined area(s) is set aside for the use of Indians. Where such established areas exist, the appropriate ITO is presumed to exercise governmental jurisdiction, unless otherwise determined by FNS.
- (2) The appropriate ITO for other areas, in order to qualify as reservations for the provisions of this part, must show to FNS:
 - (i) That the ITO exercises governmental jurisdiction over a geographic area(s) which enjoys legal recognition from the Federal or a State government and is set aside for the use of Indians;
 - (ii) A clear and precise description of the boundaries of such geographic area(s).

- (d) ***Application by an ITO.*** Any ITO which desires to participate in the Food Distribution Program shall file an application with the FNS Regional Office serving the State or States in which the reservation is located. The ITO shall specify if it is requesting the Food Distribution Program alone or concurrently with SNAP. The ITO shall also specify whether it wants either or both programs on all or part of the reservation, and if on part, shall describe the geographic boundaries of the relevant part(s). Additionally, if the ITO wishes to serve areas near the reservation, the ITO shall describe the geographic boundaries of the near area(s) for FNS review and approval. The ITO application shall also provide other information requested by FNS, including but not limited to, that the ITO serves an established reservation or a reservation otherwise qualified as described in paragraph (c) of this section. Properly addressed applications shall be acknowledged by the FNS Regional Office in writing within five working days of receipt.

(e) **Tribal capability.**

- (1) In determining whether the ITO on a given reservation is potentially capable of effectively and efficiently administering a Food Distribution Program, allowing for fulfillment of that potential through training and technical assistance, FNS shall consult with other sources, such as the BIA, and shall consider the ITO's experience, if any, in operating other government programs and its management and fiscal capabilities. Other factors for evaluation include, but are not limited to, the ITO's ability to:
 - (i) Order and properly store USDA Foods,
 - (ii) Certify eligible households,
 - (iii) Arrange for physical issuance of USDA Foods,
 - (iv) Keep appropriate records and submit required reports,
 - (v) Budget and account for administrative funds,
 - (vi) Determine the food preferences of households, and
 - (vii) Conduct on-site reviews of certification and distribution procedures and practices.
- (2) The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) shall make a determination of potential Indian Tribal Organization (ITO) capability within 30 days of receipt of a completed application for the Food Distribution Program. FNS shall promptly advise ITOs of the need for additional information if an incomplete application is received.
- (3) FNS shall, if requested by an ITO which has been determined by FNS to be potentially capable of administering a Food Distribution Program, provide the ITO's designees with appropriate training and technical assistance to prepare the ITO to take over program administration. In determining what training and technical assistance are necessary, FNS shall consult with the ITO and other sources, such as the BIA.

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979, as amended by Amdt. 163, 45 FR 14006, Mar. 4, 1980. Redesignated and amended by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982; 89 FR 87254, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.5 State agency requirements.

(a) **Plan of operation.**

- (1) The State agency that assumes responsibility for the Food Distribution Program shall submit a plan of operation for approval by FNS. Approval of the plan shall be a prerequisite to the donation of USDA Foods available for use by households under part 250 of this chapter. The approved plan shall be considered permanent, with amendments to be added as changes in State agency administration or management of the program, as described in the plan, are made, or at the request of FNS. No amendment to the plan of operation of any State agency shall be effective without prior approval of FNS, and FNS may require amendment of any plan as a condition of continuing approval. If the agency is not an ITO, the appropriate agency of the State government shall also:
 - (i) Consult in good faith with the ITO on the reservation where the appropriate agency of the State government is responsible for administering the Food Distribution Program.

- (ii) A State agency which is not an ITO shall submit its plan of operation, budget and any substantive subsequent amendments to the ITO for comment at least 45 days prior to submission of the plan, budget or amendment to FNS. Comments by the ITO shall be attached to the plan, budget or amendment which is submitted to FNS. This paragraph does not apply to amendments required by FNS under § 253.7(a)(1).
- (2) The plan of operation shall describe the manner in which USDA Foods will be distributed, including, but not limited to, the storage and distribution facilities to be used, the procedures to assure ongoing consultation with the ITO where the appropriate agency of the State government administers the Program, the method by which the food preferences of households shall be determined, the manner in which the State agency plans to supervise the Food Distribution Program, and plans by which the State agency will control dual participation. The plan shall also include by reference or otherwise the following assurances:
 - (i) No household on any Indian reservation shall be permitted to participate simultaneously in SNAP and the Food Distribution Program.
 - (ii) The value of the USDA Foods provided to any eligible household shall not be considered income or resources for any purposes under any Federal, State, or local laws, including, but not limited to, laws relating to taxation, welfare, and public assistance programs; and no State agency shall decrease any assistance otherwise provided to a household because of the receipt of USDA Foods.
 - (iii) The distribution of USDA Foods shall not be used as a means for furthering the political interest of any individual or party.
 - (iv) There shall be no discrimination in the certification of applicant households or in the distribution of USDA Foods because of sex, race, color, age, political beliefs, religion, handicap or national origin.
 - (v) Households shall not be required to make any payments in money, materials or services for, or in connection with, the receipt of USDA Foods; and they shall not be solicited in connection with the receipt of USDA Foods for voluntary cash contributions for any purpose.
 - (vi) Adequate personnel, including supervisory personnel, to review the Food Distribution Program shall be provided to ensure compliance with the requirements of this part.
 - (vii) Use of disclosure of information obtained from food distribution applicant households, exclusively for the Food Distribution Program, shall be restricted to persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the provisions of the Food Distribution Programs as defined in this part of this subchapter, the Food Stamp Act or regulations, or with other Federal or federally aided, means-tested assistance programs such as title IV-A (TANF), XIX (Medicaid), or XVI (SSI), or with general assistance programs that are subject to the joint processing requirements specified in § 273.2(j)(2).
- (b) **Operating manuals.** The State agency shall maintain ongoing consultation with the ITO in developing the State agency's written internal policies, instructions, and forms which are necessary to carry out the Food Distribution Program and shall submit them to FNS for approval prior to their use. The State agency shall file any comments or recommendations offered by the ITO, for review by FNS.
- (c) **Staffing.** Personnel used in the certification process shall be employed in accordance with

- (1) the current standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration or any standards later prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management under section 208 of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 or
- (2) when appropriate, the ITO's personnel system if it incorporates the basic elements of a merit system.

(d) **Bilingual requirements.**

- (1) The State agency shall provide bilingual staff, certification forms, including the application form and certification notices as specified in § 253.7(a)(2) and (b)(3), respectively, and any form developed by the State agency for reporting changes in household composition and income, pursuant to § 253.7(c), and outreach materials, when either an estimated 100 or more low income households or the majority of low-income households on the reservation are a single language minority. Single-language minority refers to households which speak the same non-English language and which do not contain adults(s) fluent in English as a second language. If the non-English language is spoken but not written, the State agency shall provide bilingual staff, if required, but not bilingual material.
- (2) The State agency shall ensure that offices serving reservations subject to the criteria in paragraph (d)(1) of this section provide sufficient bilingual staff for the timely processing of non-English speaking applicants.
- (3) The State agency shall develop estimates of the numbers of low-income, single-language minority households by using census data (including the Census Bureau's Current Population Report: Population Estimates and Projections, Series P-25, No. 627) and knowledge of the reservation. Local Bureau of Census offices, Community Services Administration offices, Community Action agencies, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Services, planning agencies, the ITO and school officials may be important sources of information in determining the need for bilingual services.

(e) **Outreach and referral.** The State agency shall inform potentially eligible households of the availability of the Food Distribution Program. The State agency shall develop and distribute printed information in the appropriate languages about the program and eligibility requirements. Outreach material shall contain information about a household's right to file an application on the same date it contacts the certification office. The State agency shall be sufficiently familiar with general eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (if available to reservation residents), the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI), and appropriate public and general assistance programs, to identify those applicants whose households contain persons who may be eligible for these programs, to inform the applicants of their potential eligibility, and to provide the applicants with the addresses and telephone numbers for these programs. For example, the State agency should provide information on the WIC program to applicants whose households contain pregnant women, nursing or postpartum women, or children up to the fifth birthday.

(f) **Training requirements.** The State agency shall institute a training program for all personnel who are assigned responsibility for the certification of applicant households, for fair hearing officers, for field supervisors who review local Food Distribution Programs, for those involved in outreach and those responsible for ordering, storing, and distributing USDA Foods.

- (1) State agency training programs shall cover eligibility criteria, certification procedures, USDA Foods ordering, storage and distribution practices, household rights and responsibilities and other job-related responsibilities. The content of the training material shall be reviewed and revised periodically to correct deficiencies in program operations or reflect changes in policy and procedures.

- (2) FNS shall review the effectiveness of State agency training based on information obtained from field reviews, administrative analyses and other sources.
- (g) **Nutrition education.** The State agency shall publicize how USDA Foods may be used to contribute to a nutritious diet and how USDA Foods may be properly stored by means of visual displays, and printed material. The State agency shall encourage appropriate organizations, county extension home economists, expanded Food and Nutrition Program aides, and qualified volunteers to provide food and nutrition information, menus, or cooking demonstrations, as appropriate for participating households. The State agency shall encourage the dissemination of food and nutrition information designed to improve the nutrition of households on reservations.
- (h) **Records and reports.** The State agency shall keep records and submit reports and other information as required by FNS. Records required under this part shall be retained for a period of three years from the date of the submission of the annual financial status report, SF-425; except that, if any litigation, claim or audit is started before the expiration of the three year period, the records shall be retained until all litigation, claims or audit findings involving the records have been resolved.
- (i) **Monitoring.** In accordance with its responsibility for efficient and effective program administration the State agency shall monitor and review its operations under this part to ensure compliance with the provisions of this part and with any applicable instructions of FNS.
- (1) The State agency shall review program operations at least annually, document program deficiencies and establish and implement specific plans of corrective action for deficiencies noted.
- (2) Reviews of operations shall include, but not be limited to, certification of households, determination of food preferences, distribution of USDA Foods, fair hearing procedures, USDA Foods inventories and timeliness and accuracy of reports to FNS.
- (3) Program reviews and corrective action plans shall be available to FNS upon request.
- (j) **Investigations and complaints.** The State agency shall promptly investigate complaints received of irregularities in the handling, distribution, receipt or use of USDA Foods, other than use of USDA Foods by eligible households in the preparation of meals for home consumption, and shall take appropriate action to correct any irregularities. The State agency shall also promptly investigate complaints of irregularities relating to certification procedures or the delivery of services and shall take appropriate action to correct any irregularities or noncompliance with provisions relating to certification procedures, provision of services or household rights. The State agency shall document each investigation and action in sufficient detail to allow for FNS review of all State agency actions and information. The Department shall make investigations at the request of the State agency and ITO or when the Department determines an investigation is necessary.
- (k) **Sanctions.** If the State agency fails to comply with the provisions of this part or its plan of operation, FNS may:
- (1) Take action against any State agency under § 253.11(g) with respect to administrative funds available from FNS for use by the State agency or
- (2) disqualify the State agency from further distribution of USDA Foods to households. Disqualification of the State agency shall not prevent FNS or the Department from taking other actions, including prosecution under applicable Federal statutes, when deemed necessary. Reinstatement shall be contingent upon approval by FNS of the State agency's plan for corrective action or determination by FNS that the State agency has complied with any other requirements for reinstatement which FNS

may set forth. These provisions apply to all State agencies, regardless of whether the Program is administered by an agency of the State government or an ITO. If the ITO is disqualified as a State agency, an appropriate agency of State government shall administer the Food Distribution Program on the reservation. If an agency of State government is disqualified as the State agency for the Food Distribution Program on the reservation, the ITO may request in writing a capability determination for program administration in accordance with § 253.4.

(l) **Appeals.**

- (1) The agency of the State government or an ITO may appeal an initial determination by FNS on:
 - (i) Whether or not the reservation definition is met;
 - (ii) The capability of an ITO to administer the Food Distribution Program;
 - (iii) Sanctions taken under paragraph (k) of this section or § 253.11(g); or
 - (iv) The Federal matching percentage level of administrative funding made available by FNS.
- (2) At the time FNS advises the State agency or ITO of its determination, FNS shall also advise the State agency or ITO of its right to appeal and, except for appeals of funding determinations, shall advise the State agency or ITO of its right to request either a meeting to present its position in person or a review of the record. On appeals of funding determinations, FNS shall advise the State agency or ITO that it may indicate if it wishes a meeting, however, FNS need schedule a meeting only if FNS determines a meeting is warranted to reach a proper adjudication of the matter. Otherwise, FNS shall review supportive information submitted by the State agency or ITO in paragraph (l)(3)(ii) of this section.
- (3) **Procedure —**
 - (i) **Time limit.** Any State agency or ITO that wants to appeal an initial FNS determination under paragraph (l) of this section must notify the Administrator of FNS, in writing, within 15 days from the date of the determination. If the appeal concerns either paragraph (l)(1) (i) or (ii) of this section, the implementation timeframes as specified in paragraph (m) of this section and the timeframe for determining an ITO's capability as specified in § 253.4(e)(2) are suspended from the date the appeal is requested to the date of the final determination.
 - (ii) **Acknowledgment.** Within five days of receipt by the Administrator, of FNS, of a request for review, FNS shall provide the State agency or ITO with a written acknowledgment of the request by certified mail, return receipt requested. The acknowledgment shall include the name and address of the official designated by the Administrator, FNS, to review the appeal. The acknowledgment shall also notify the State agency or ITO that within ten days of receipt of the acknowledgment, the State agency or ITO shall submit written information in support of its position.
- (4) **Scheduling a meeting.** If the Administrator, FNS, grants a meeting FNS shall advise the State agency or ITO of the time, date and location of the meeting by certified mail, return receipt requested at least ten days in advance of the meeting. FNS shall schedule and conduct the meeting and make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the information submitted in response to paragraph (l)(3)(ii) of this section.

(5) **Review.** If no meeting is conducted the official designated by the Administrator, FNS, shall review information presented by a State agency or ITO which requests a review and shall make a final determination in writing within 45 days of the receipt of the State agency's or ITO's information submitted in response to paragraph (l)(3)(ii) of this section setting forth in full the reasons for the determination.

(6) **Final decision.** The official's decision after a meeting or a review shall be final.

(m) **Implementation.** The State agency shall implement changes required by amendments to these regulations in accordance with schedules specified in the amendment.

(1) **Amendment 2.**

(i) If an ITO currently participates in, but does not administer, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations:

(A) FNS shall determine tribal eligibility and capability to administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations within 60 days of receipt of a completed application. If an incomplete application is received, FNS shall within 15 days, notify the ITO of what additional information is required. The processing time for the capability determination shall start from the date the additional information is received by FNS.

(B) Upon FNS' determination that the ITO will administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FNS shall expeditiously plan for and provide needed training and technical assistance to facilitate timely commencement of tribal administrative responsibilities. The ITO shall have 120 days from FNS' determination in paragraph (m)(1)(i)(A) of this section to submit and have approved a plan of operation, operating manuals, and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part. Extensions may be granted by FNS to ITOs if good cause is shown.

(C) If FNS determines that an ITO is not capable of administering the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FNS shall direct the State to continue program operations and submit a new plan of operation and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part within 120 days from FNS' determination in paragraph (m)(1)(i)(A) of this section.

(ii) If an ITO currently administers the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, the timeframes specified in paragraph (m)(1)(i) of this section apply except that:

(A) FNS shall determine tribal eligibility and capability to administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations within 30 days of receipt of a completed application.

(B) If FNS determines that the ITO will not administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FNS shall direct the ITO to continue program operations until the State government can commence program operations. The State government shall have 120 days from FNS' determination in paragraph (m)(1)(i)(A) of this section to submit and have approved a plan of operation and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part.

- (iii) If an ITO does not currently participate in a Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, the timeframes in paragraph (m)(1)(i) of this section apply except that if FNS determines that an ITO cannot administer the program, FNS shall direct the State to submit a plan of operation and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part within 180 days from the determination.
- (iv) Extensions to the above implementation timeframe (except for those timeframes set forth in paragraphs (m)(1) (i)(A) and (ii)(A) of this section) may be granted by FNS to ITOs or State government agencies if there is compelling justification involving circumstances which were not reasonably foreseeable and which are not the fault of the ITO or the State agency and which circumstances present extraordinary problems that would render earlier implementation impossible.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 0584-0071)

(44 U.S.C. 3506; E.O. 12372, July 14, 1982, 47 FR 30959, sec. 401(b) of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968, 31 U.S.C. 6506(c))

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§ 253.6 Eligibility of households.

(a) *Household concept.*

- (1) The State agency shall determine eligibility for the Food Distribution Program on a household basis. Household means any of the following individuals or groups of individuals, provided that such individuals or groups are not boarders or residents of an institution.
 - (i) An individual living alone.
 - (ii) An individual living with others, but customarily purchasing food and preparing meals for home consumption separate and apart from the others.
 - (iii) A group of individuals living together for whom food is customarily purchased in common and for whom meals are prepared together for home consumption.
 - (iv) **Spouses living separately.** For purposes of this part, spouses living separately and apart are considered separate households.
- (2) **Nonhousehold members.** The following individuals residing with a household shall not be considered household members in determining the household's eligibility. Nonhousehold members specified in paragraphs (a)(2) (i) and (v) who are otherwise eligible may participate in the Program as separate households.
 - (i) **Roomers.** Individuals to whom a household furnishes lodging, but not meals, for compensation.
 - (ii) **Disqualified individuals.** Individuals disqualified from the Food Distribution Program per 253.7(f)(1) and SNAP for fraud, as set forth in § 273.16.

- (iii) **Illegal residents.** Individuals who are not legal residents of the United States. While U.S. citizenship is not required for participation in the Food Distribution Program, persons receiving food distribution benefits must be lawfully living in the United States.
 - (iv) **Others.** Other individuals who share living quarters with the household but who do not customarily purchase food and prepare meals with the household. For example, if the applicant household shares living quarters with another family to save on rent, but does not purchase and prepare food together with that family, the members of the other family are not members of the applicant household.
- (3) **Authorized representatives.** The head of the household, spouse, or any other responsible member of the household may designate an authorized representative to act on behalf of the household in making application for USDA Foods and/or obtaining USDA Foods as provided in § 253.7(a)(10)(i) and § 253.7(a)(10)(ii) respectively.
 - (4) **Children.** A child (other than a foster child) under 18 years of age who lives with and is under the parental control of a household member must be considered a member of the household. A child must be considered under parental control for purposes of this provision if they are financially or otherwise dependent on a member of the household, unless State law defines such a person as an adult.

(b) **Residency or citizenship.**

- (1) All households residing on a reservation on which the FDPIR operates shall be eligible to apply for program benefits on that reservation regardless of whether they include an Indian member. All Indian tribal households as defined in § 253.2 of this part which reside in near areas established under § 253.4(d) of this part shall be eligible to apply for program benefits. The ITO or State agency shall serve all income-eligible applicant households residing on reservations who apply for benefits, and all income-eligible applicant Indian tribal households residing in near areas. The ITO or State agency administering the program in a near area shall, for purposes of determining program eligibility, accept documentation from a household member's tribe of origin as proof of tribal membership. Residency shall not mean domicile nor shall the State agency impose any durational residency requirement. However, persons on the reservation solely for vacations shall not be considered residents. No household may participate in or in the Food Distribution Program in more than one geographical area at the same time.
- (2) No person shall participate in the Food Distribution Program on an Indian reservation unless the person is legally a resident of the United States. A further discussion of "legal residency" is provided in paragraph (a)(2)(iv) of this section.

(c) **Income eligibility standards of public assistance, supplemental security income (SSI), and certain general assistance households.**

- (1) Households in which all members are included in a federally aided public assistance or SSI grant shall, if otherwise eligible under this part, be determined to be eligible to participate in the Food Distribution Program while receiving such grants without regard to the income of the household members.

- (2) If FNS determines that a State or local general assistance program applies criteria of need the same as or similar to, those applied under any of the federally aided public assistance programs, households in which all members are included in such a general assistance grant, shall, if otherwise eligible under this part, be determined to be eligible to participate in the Food Distribution Program while receiving such grants without regard to the income of household members.

(d) **Income —**

(1) ***Income eligibility standards for nonassistance households.***

- (i) The State agency shall apply uniform national income eligibility standards for the Food Distribution Program except for households in which all members are recipients of public assistance, SSI, paragraph (c) of this section, or certain general assistance program payments as provided in § 283.6(c). The income eligibility standards shall be the applicable SNAP net monthly income eligibility standards for the appropriate area, increased by the amount of the applicable SNAP standard deduction for that area.
- (ii) The income eligibility standards for the Food Distribution Program shall be adjusted each October 1, as necessary, to reflect changes in SNAP income eligibility limits and standard deductions.

(2) ***Definition of income.*** Household income shall mean all income from whatever source, excluding only items specified in paragraph (e)(3) of this section.

(i) Earned income shall include:

- (A) All wages and salaries of an employee.
- (B) The total gross income from a self-employment enterprise, including the net profit from the sale of any capital goods or equipment related to the business. Ownership of rental property shall be considered a self-employment enterprise. Payments from a roomer and returns on rental property shall be considered self-employment income.
- (C) Training allowances from vocational and rehabilitative programs recognized by Federal, State or local governments, such as the Work Incentive Program, and programs authorized by the Job Training Partnership Act, to the extent they are not a reimbursement.

(ii) Unearned income shall include, but not be limited to:

- (A) Assistance payments from Federal or Federally aided public assistance programs, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA) programs, or other assistance programs based on need.
- (B) Annuities; pensions; retirement; veteran's or disability benefits; worker's or unemployment compensation; old-age, survivors, or social security benefits; strike benefits; foster care payments for children or adults.
- (C) Support or alimony payments made directly to the household from nonhousehold members.
- (D) Scholarships, education grants, fellowships, deferred payment loans for education, veteran's education benefit and the like in excess of amounts excluded under paragraph (d)(3)(iii) of this section.

- (E) Payments from Government-sponsored programs, dividends, interest, royalties, and all other direct money payments from any source which can be construed to be a gain or benefit.
- (F) Per capita payments that are derived from the profits of Tribal enterprises and distributed to Tribal members on a monthly basis.
- (G) The earned or unearned income of an individual disqualified from participation in SNAP for fraud shall continue to be counted as income, less the pro rata share for the disqualified member. Procedures for calculating this pro rata share are described in § 253.7.
- (iii) Income shall not include the following:
 - (A) Monies withheld from an assistance payment, earned income or other income source, or monies received from any income source which are voluntarily or involuntarily returned to repay a prior overpayment received from that income source.
 - (B) Child support payments received by TANF recipients which must be transferred to the agency administering title IV-D of the Social Security Act of 1935, as amended, to maintain TANF eligibility.
- (3) **Income exclusions.** Only the following items shall be excluded from household income and no other income shall be disregarded:
 - (i) Any gain or benefit which is not in the form of money payable directly to the household, including:
 - (A) **In-kind income.** Nonmonetary or in-kind benefits, such as meals, clothing, public housing, or produce from a garden.
 - (B) **Vendor payments.** A payment made in money on behalf of a household shall be considered a vendor payment whenever a person or organization outside of the household uses its own funds to make a direct payment to either the household's creditors or a person or organization providing a service to the household. For example, if a relative, who is not a household member, pays out of its own resources the household's rent directly to the landlord, the payment is considered a vendor payment and is not counted as income to the household. Also, payments specified by a court order or other written support or alimony agreement to go directly to a third party rather than the household and support payments which are paid to a third party are excluded as vendor payments. Wages garnished or diverted by employers, or money deducted or otherwise diverted from a household's public assistance grant by a State for purposes such as managing the household's expenses, shall not be considered a vendor payment, since the person or organization making the payment is using money payable to the household rather than its own funds.
 - (ii) Any income in the certification period which is received too infrequently or irregularly to be reasonably anticipated, but not in excess of \$30 in a quarter.
 - (iii) Education loans on which payment is deferred, grants scholarships, fellowships, veterans' educational benefits, and the like to the extent that they are used for tuition and mandatory school fees. Mandatory fees are those charged to all students or those charged to all students within a certain curriculum. For example, uniforms, lab fees, or equipment charged to all

students to enroll in a chemistry course would be excluded. However, transportation, supplies, and textbook expenses are not uniformly charged to all students and, therefore, would not be excluded as mandatory fees.

- (iv) All loans, including loans from private individuals as well as commercial institutions, other than education loans on which repayment is deferred.
- (v) Reimbursements for past or future expenses to the extent they do not exceed actual expenses. For example, reimbursements of flat allowances for job or training related expenses such as travel per diem, uniforms, and transportation to and from the job or training site are excluded as income.
- (vi) Monies received and used for care and maintenance of a third party beneficiary who is not a household member.
- (vii) The earned income (as defined in paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section) of children who are members of the household, who are students at least half time and who have not attained their eighteenth birthday. The exclusion shall continue to apply during temporary interruptions in school attendance due to semester or vacation breaks, provided the child's enrollment will resume following the break. Individuals are considered children for purposes of this provision if they are under the parental control of another household member.
- (viii) Money received in the form of a nonrecurring lump sum payment, including but not limited to, income tax refunds, rebates, or credits; retroactive lump-sum social security, SSI, public assistance, railroad retirement benefits or other payments, or retroactive lump-sum insurance settlements; refunds of security deposits on rental properties or utilities or lump-sum payments arising from land interests held in trust for, or by, a tribe.
- (ix) The cost of producing self-employment income. The procedures for computing the cost of producing self-employment income are described in § 253.7(b)(1)(iii).
- (x) Any income that is specifically excluded by any other Federal statute from consideration as income. The following Federal statutes provide such an exclusion.
 - (A) Reimbursements from the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policy Act of 1970 (Pub. L. 91-646, section 216).
 - (B) Payments received under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (Pub. L. 92-203, section 21(a)).
 - (C) Any payment to volunteers under Title II (RSVP, foster grandparents, and others) and title III (SCORE and ACE) of the Domestic Volunteer Services Act of 1973 (Pub. L. 93-113), as amended. Payments under title I (VISTA) to volunteers shall be excluded for those individuals receiving federally donated USDA Foods, SNAP, or public assistance at the time they joined the title I program, except that households which are receiving an income exclusion for a VISTA or other title I subsistence allowance at the time of implementation of these rules shall continue to receive an income exclusion for VISTA for the length of their volunteer contract in effect at the time of implementation of these rules. Temporary interruptions in food distribution shall not alter the exclusion once an initial determination has been made. New applicants who are not receiving federally donated USDA Foods, SNAP benefits or public assistance at the time they joined VISTA shall have these volunteer payments included as earned income.

- (D) Income derived from certain submarginal land of the United States which is held in trust for certain Indian tribes (Pub. L. 94-114, section 6).
- (E) Payments received by certain Indian tribal members under Pub. L. 94-540 regarding the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians.
- (xi) **Combat pay.** Combat pay is defined as additional payment that is received by or from a member of the United States Armed Forces deployed to a combat zone, if the additional pay is the result of deployment to or service in a combat zone, and was not received immediately prior to serving in a combat zone.
- (xii) Per capita payments that are derived from the profits of Tribal enterprises and distributed to Tribal members less frequently than monthly (e.g., quarterly, semiannually or annually) are excluded from consideration as income.

(e) **Income deductions –**

- (1) **Earned income deduction.** Households with earned income, as defined in paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section, shall be allowed a deduction of twenty percent of their gross earned income. Earned income excluded under paragraph (d)(3) of this section shall not be considered earned income for the purpose of computing this deduction.
- (2) **Dependent care deduction.** Households shall also receive a deduction for the actual costs for the care of a child or other dependent when necessary for a household member to accept or continue employment or attend training or pursue education which is preparatory to employment.
- (3) **Child support deduction.** Households will receive a deduction for legally required child support payments paid by a household member to or for a nonhousehold member, including payments made to a third party on behalf of the nonhousehold member (vendor payments). The State agency must allow a deduction for amounts paid towards overdue child support (arrearages). Alimony payments made to or for a nonhousehold member cannot be included in the child support deduction.
- (4) **Excess medical deduction.** Households must receive a medical deduction for that portion of medical expenses in excess of \$35 per month, excluding special diets, incurred by any household member who is elderly or disabled as defined in § 253.2. Spouses or other persons receiving benefits as a dependent of a Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or disability and blindness recipient are not eligible to receive this deduction; however, persons receiving emergency SSI benefits based on presumptive eligibility are eligible for this deduction. The allowable medical costs are those permitted at § 273.9(d)(3) of this chapter for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- (5) **Shelter/utility deduction.** Households that incur monthly shelter and utility expenses will receive a shelter/utility deduction. The household may choose to receive a standard deduction or to provide actual expenses, subject to the provisions below.
 - (i) The household must incur, on a monthly basis, at least one allowable shelter/utility expense. The allowable shelter/utility expenses are those permitted at § 273.9(d)(6)(ii) of this chapter for SNAP.
 - (ii) The shelter/utility standard deduction amounts are set by FNS. The standard deductions are adjusted annually to reflect changes to SNAP maximum monthly excess shelter expense limits per § 273.9(d)(6)(ii) of this chapter. FNS will advise the State agencies of the updates prior to October 1 of each year.

- (iii) Households that select actual expenses, may claim expenses up to the amount that does not exceed 50 percent of their net monthly income.

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§ 253.7 Certification of households.

(a) Application processing –

- (1) **General purpose.** The application process includes filing and completing an application form, being interviewed, and having certain information verified. The State agency shall act promptly on all applications. Expedited service shall be available to household in immediate need. When the State agency is other than the ITO, the ITO, when appropriate, may receive copies of certification and/or termination notices to the extent requested or agreed upon by the household. State agencies and ITOs may develop formalized mechanisms to ensure ITO receipt of notices.
- (2) **Food Distribution Program application form.** The State agency shall use an application form acceptable to FNS. The State agency shall consult with the ITO in developing the application form. The State agency shall make application forms readily accessible to potentially eligible households and those groups or organizations involved in outreach efforts. The State agency shall also provide an application form to anyone who requests the form. State agencies which elect joint PA or GA/ Food Distribution Program procedures shall follow the requirements of paragraph (g) of this section for the application form. State agencies may also use an abbreviated recertification form.
- (3) **Filing an application.** Households must file an application for the Food Distribution Program by submitting the form to a certification office in person, through an authorized representative or by mail. The State agency shall document the date the application was received. Each household has the right to file an application form the same day it contacts the certification office during office hours on the reservation where the household resides. The household shall be advised that it does not have to be interviewed before filing the application and may file an incomplete application form as long as the application contains the applicant's name and address and is signed by a responsible member of the household or the household's authorized representative.
- (4) **Household cooperation.** To determine eligibility, the application form must be completed and signed, the household or its authorized representative must be interviewed, and certain information on the application must be verified. If the household refuses to cooperate with the State agency in completing this process, the application shall be denied upon a determination of refusal. For a determination of refusal to be made, the household must be able to cooperate, but clearly demonstrate that it will not take actions that it can take and that are required to complete the application process. For example, to be denied for refusal to cooperate, a household must refuse to be interviewed and not merely fail to appear for the interview. If there is any question as to whether the household has merely failed to cooperate, as opposed to refused to cooperate, the household shall not be denied solely for this reason. The household shall also be determined ineligible if it refuses to cooperate in any subsequent review of its eligibility. Once denied or terminated for refusal to cooperate, the household may reapply but shall not be determined eligible until it cooperates.
- (5) **Interviews.** All applicant households, including those submitting applications by mail, shall have an interview with a qualified eligibility worker prior to initial certification and all recertifications. At State agency discretion, applicants may be interviewed by telephone or in the home. No household shall

be interviewed by telephone for any two consecutive certifications without a face-to-face interview. State agencies must attempt to schedule home visits in advance. Home visits cannot extend required processing standards set forth in paragraphs (a)(7) and (a)(9) of this section. The individual interviewed may be the head of household, spouse, any other responsible member of the household or an authorized representative. The household, if it wishes, may be accompanied to the interview by anyone of its choice. The interviewer shall not only review the information that appears on the application, but shall explore and resolve with the household unclear and incomplete information. Households shall be advised of their rights and responsibilities during the interview. The interview shall be conducted as an official and confidential discussion of household circumstances. The applicant's right to privacy shall be protected during the interview. Facilities shall be adequate to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the interview.

(6) **Verification.** Verification is the use of third party information or documentation to establish the accuracy of statements on the application in order to determine eligibility or ineligibility of the household.

(i) **Mandatory verification.**

- (A) **Gross non-exempt income.** The State agency must obtain verification of each household's gross non-exempt income prior to certification. Households certified under the expedited service processing standards at paragraph (a)(9) of this section are not subject to this requirement. Income does not need to be verified to the exact dollar amount unless the household's eligibility would be affected, since Food Distribution Program benefits are not reduced as income rises. If the eligibility worker is unable to verify the household's income, the worker must determine an amount to be used for certification purposes based on the best available information. Reasons for inability to verify income include failure of the person or organization providing the income to cooperate with the household and the State agency, or lack of other sources of verification.
- (B) **Legal obligation and actual child support payments.** The State agency must obtain verification of the household's legal obligation to pay child support, the amount of the obligation, and the monthly amount of child support the household actually pays. Documentation that verifies the household's legal obligation to pay child support, such as a court order, cannot be used to verify the household's actual monthly child support payments.
- (C) **Medical expense deduction.** The State agency must obtain verification for those medical expenses that the household wishes to deduct in accordance with 7 CFR 253.6(e)(4). The allowability of services provided (e.g., whether the billing health professional is a licensed practitioner authorized by State law or other qualified health professional) must be verified, if questionable. Only out-of-pocket expenses can be deducted. Expenses reimbursed to the household by an insurer are not deductible. The eligibility of the household to qualify for the deduction (i.e., the household includes a member who is elderly or disabled) must be verified, if questionable.
- (D) **Shelter/utility deduction.** A household must incur, on a monthly basis, at least one allowable shelter/utility expense in accordance with § 253.6(e)(5)(i) of this chapter to qualify for the shelter/utility deduction. The State agency must verify that the household incurs the expense. If the household chooses to provide actual expenses, then the State agency must obtain verification for each shelter/utility deduction that the household wishes to deduct.

- (ii) **Verification of questionable information.** Eligibility criteria other than income, including residency on or near the reservation, shall be verified prior to certification only if they are questionable. To be considered questionable, the information on the application must be inconsistent with statements by the applicant, inconsistent with other information on the application or previous applications, or inconsistent with other information received by the State agency. However, due to the difficulty in verifying whether a group of individuals is a household, State agencies shall generally accept the household's statement regarding food preparation and consumption.
- (iii) **Responsibility for obtaining verification.** The household has primary responsibility for providing documentary evidence or an acceptable collateral contact to support its income statements and to resolve any questionable information. However, the State agency shall assist the household in obtaining the needed verification. The State agency shall accept any reasonable documentary evidence provided by the household and shall be primarily concerned with how adequately the verification proves the statements on the application. The State agency shall also accept verification from collateral contacts so long as the collateral contacts can provide accurate third party verification. The State agency shall rely on the household to provide the name of the collateral contact. The State agency is not required to use a collateral contact designated by the household if the collateral contact cannot be expected to provide accurate third party verification. If the collateral contact designated by the household is unacceptable to the State agency, the State agency shall ask the household to designate another collateral contact, and the State agency shall document the casefile as to the reason the collateral contact was rejected and an alternate was requested. The State agency shall use collateral contacts, rather than documentary evidence, for verification if such verification is acceptable, and would result in better service to the household. For example, the household may be able to obtain a wage stub from the employer, but the State agency could call the employer the same day to provide the verification of income. Home visits shall be used as verification only if documentary evidence and collateral contacts cannot be obtained, and the State agency attempts to schedule the visit in advance with the household.
- (iv) **Documentation.** Casefiles must be documented to support a determination of eligibility or denial. Documentation shall be in sufficient detail to permit a reviewer to determine the reasonableness and accuracy of the determination.
- (v) **Verification for recertification.** At recertification, the State agency shall verify a change in gross income if the source has changed or the amount has changed by more than \$100 per month since the last time the gross income was verified. State agencies may verify income which is unchanged or has changed by \$100 per month or less, provided verification is, at a minimum, required when information is questionable as defined in paragraph (a)(6)(ii) of this section. All other changes reported at the time of recertification shall be subject to the same verification procedures as apply at initial certification. Unchanged information, other than income, shall not be verified at recertification unless the information is questionable as defined in paragraph (a)(6)(ii) of this section.
- (7) **Processing standards.** The State agency shall provide eligible households that complete the initial application process an opportunity to participate as soon as possible, but not later than seven calendar days excluding weekends and holidays after the application was filed. An application is filed the day the State agency receives an application containing the applicant's name and address and which is signed by either a responsible member of the household or the household's authorized representative.

- (8) ***Delays in processing.*** If the State agency cannot determine a household's eligibility within seven calendar days excluding weekends and holidays of the date the application was filed due to lack of verification as required in paragraph (a)(6) of this section, the State agency shall authorize the distribution of USDA Foods to the household for one month pending verification. In order to certify the household pending verification, the information on the application form must be complete and indicate that the household will likely be eligible. No further distribution of USDA Foods shall be made without completing the eligibility determination.
- (9) ***Expedited service.*** The State agency shall provide an opportunity to obtain USDA Foods within one calendar day excluding weekends and holidays after the date the application was filed for those households with no income in the current month and also for those households which, in the judgment of the certifying agency, would likely be eligible and would otherwise suffer a hardship. The basis for this determination shall be recorded in the casefile. State agencies shall provide same day service, if possible, to households eligible for expedited service which would likely suffer a hardship if required to return to the office the next day. Warehouses or other distribution points need not be open during all certification hours to meet this need. However, accessibility to federally donated USDA Foods by appropriate certification or other personnel should be established for households in immediate need. When State agencies can demonstrate a need, FNS may approve other expedited timeframes based on circumstances such as distance to warehouses or other distribution points. To expedite the certification of households in immediate need the State agency shall postpone the verification required under paragraph (a)(6) of this section. However, the State agency shall verify the household's identity and address through a collateral contact or readily available documentary evidence. If possible, the household's income statements should be verified at the same time. The State agency shall complete the verification for households certified on an expedited basis prior to the distribution of USDA Foods to the household for any subsequent month.
- (10) ***Authorized representatives.*** The head of the household, spouse, or any other responsible member of the household may designate an authorized representative to act on behalf of the household in one or all of the following capacities:
- (i) ***Making application for USDA Foods.*** When the head of the household or the spouse cannot make application, another household member may apply or an adult nonhousehold member may be designated in writing as the authorized representative for that purpose. The head of the household or the spouse should prepare or review the application whenever possible, even though another household member or the authorized representative will actually be interviewed. Adults who are nonhousehold members may be designated as authorized representatives for certification purposes only if they are sufficiently aware of relevant household circumstances.
 - (ii) ***Obtaining USDA Foods.*** An authorized representative of the household may be designated to obtain USDA Foods. Designation shall be made at the time the application is completed except that the household may be permitted to designate an emergency authorized representative in the event that illness or other unforeseen circumstances prevent the household from otherwise obtaining USDA Foods. Designation of an emergency authorized representative must be made in writing by a responsible member of the household. State agencies may distribute USDA Foods to household members or authorized representatives presenting an identification card or other appropriate identification that satisfactorily identifies the member obtaining USDA Foods.

(b) ***Eligibility determinations —***

- (1) ***Determining income.***

- (i) The State agency shall take into account the income already received by the household during the certification period and any anticipated income the household and the State agency are reasonably certain will be received during the remainder of the certification period. If the amount of income that is anticipated is uncertain, that portion of the household's income that is uncertain shall not be counted by the State agency. For example, a household anticipating income from a new source, such as a new job or recently applied for public assistance benefits, may be uncertain as to the timing and amount of the initial payment. These monies shall not be anticipated by the State agency unless there is reasonable certainty concerning the month in which the payment will be received and in what amount. If the exact amount of the income is not known, that portion of it which can be anticipated with reasonable certainty shall be considered as income. In cases where the receipt of income is reasonably certain but the monthly amount may fluctuate, and the household's income is close to the income eligibility limit the State agency may elect to average income provided that such averaging does not disadvantage the household. Such averaging shall be based on income that is anticipated to be available to the household during the certification period. The State agency shall use income received in the past 30 days as an indicator of future income during the certification period unless changes in income have occurred or can be anticipated.
- (ii) Income anticipated during the certification period shall be counted as income only in the month it is expected to be received, unless the income is averaged.
- (iii)
 - (A) Self-employment income which represents a household's annual support including the net profit from the sale of any capital goods or equipment related to the business shall be annualized over a 12-month period, even if the income is received in only a short period of time. For example, self-employment income received by farmers shall be averaged over a 12-month period if the income represents the farmer's annual support.
 - (B) Self-employment income which represents only a part of a household's annual support, including the net profit from the sale of any capital goods or equipment related to the business, shall be averaged over the period of time the income is intended to cover. For example, self-employed vendors who work only in the summer and supplement their income from other sources during the balance of the year shall have their self-employment income averaged over the summer months rather than a 12-month period.
 - (C) For the period of time over which self-employment income is determined, the State agency shall add all gross self-employment income, exclude the cost of producing the self-employment income and divide the net self-employment income by the number of months over which the income will be averaged. The allowable costs of producing self-employment income include but are not limited to, the identifiable costs of labor, stock, raw materials, seed and fertilizer, interest paid to purchase income producing property, insurance premiums, and taxes paid on income producing property.
 - (D) In determining net self-employment income, payments on the principal of the purchase price of income-producing real estate and capital assets, equipment, machinery, and other durable goods, net losses from previous periods, Federal, State, and local income taxes, money set aside for retirement purposes, and other work-related personal expenses (such as transportation to and from work) will not be allowable costs of doing business.

- (iv) The monthly net self-employment income shall be added to any other earned income received by the household. The total monthly earned income, less the 20 percent earned income deduction, shall then be added to all monthly unearned income received by the household.
- (v) Allowable costs for dependent care shall be subtracted from the household's total monthly income to determine net monthly income.
- (vi) The total net monthly income shall be compared to the income eligibility standard for the appropriate household size to determine the household's eligibility.

(2) ***Certification periods.***

- (i) The State agency shall establish definite periods of time within which households shall be eligible to receive benefits. Further eligibility shall be established upon a recertification based upon a newly completed application, an interview, and such verification as required by paragraph (a)(6)(v) of this section.
- (ii) Certification periods shall conform to calendar months. The first month in the certification period of initial applicants shall be the month in which eligibility is determined. For example, if a household submits an application in late January and the household is determined eligible on the fifth working day which falls in February, a six-month certification period would include February through July. Upon recertification, the certification period will begin with the month following the last month of the previous certification period.
- (iii) A household shall be assigned a certification period for as long a period as the household's circumstances are expected to remain sufficiently stable such that the household is expected to continue to meet the program's eligibility standards.
- (iv) In no event may a certification period exceed 12 months, except that households in which all adult members are elderly and/or disabled may be certified for up to 24 months. Households assigned certification periods that are longer than 12 months must be contacted by the State agency at least once every 12 months to determine if the household wishes to continue to participate in the program and whether there are any changes in household circumstances that would warrant a redetermination of eligibility or a change in benefit level. The State agency may use any method it chooses for this contact, including a face-to-face interview, telephone call or a home visit. Contact with the household's authorized representative would not satisfy this requirement; the State agency must contact a household member. The case file must document the contact with the household and include the date of contact, method of contact, name of person contacted, whether the household wishes to continue to participate, and whether changes in household circumstances would warrant a redetermination of eligibility or a change in benefit level.

(3) ***Certification notices –***

- (i) ***Notice of eligibility.*** If an application is approved, the State agency shall provide the household a written notice of eligibility and the beginning and ending dates of the certification period. Households certified on an expedited basis shall be advised that the subsequent month's eligibility will depend upon completion of the postponed verification.

- (ii) **Notice of denial.** If the application is denied, the State agency shall provide the household written notice explaining the basis for the denial, the household's right to request a fair hearing, and the telephone number and address of the person to contact for additional information. If there is an individual or organization available which provides free legal representation, the notice shall also advise the household of the availability of the service.
- (iii) **Notice of adverse action.**
 - (A) Prior to any action to reduce or terminate a household's benefits within the certification period, except for households voluntarily switching program participation from the Food Distribution Program to SNAP, State agencies shall provide the household timely and adequate advance notice before the adverse action is taken. The notice must be issued within 10 days of determining that an adverse action is warranted. The adverse action must take effect with the next scheduled distribution of USDA Foods that follows the expiration of the advance notice period unless the household requests a fair hearing.
 - (B) In State agencies that have elected joint public assistance or general assistance and Food Distribution processing, the notice of adverse action shall be considered timely if the advance notice period conforms to that period of time defined by the State agency as an adequate notice period for its public or general assistance caseload, provided that the period includes at least 10 days from the date the notice is mailed to the date upon which the action becomes effective. In circumstances other than joint processing, the advance notice shall be considered timely if the advance notice period includes at least 10 days from the date the notice is issued to the date upon which the action becomes effective.
 - (C) The notice of adverse action must include the following in easily understandable language:
 - (1) The reason for the adverse action;
 - (2) The date the adverse action will take effect;
 - (3) The household's right to request a fair hearing and continue to receive benefits pending the outcome of the fair hearing;
 - (4) The date by which the household must request the fair hearing;
 - (5) The liability of the household for any overissuances received while awaiting the outcome of the fair hearing, if the fair hearing official's decision is adverse to the household;
 - (6) The telephone number and address of someone to contact for additional information; and
 - (7) The telephone number and address of an individual or organization that provides free legal representation, if available.
 - (D) The State agency shall continue distribution of USDA Foods to the household after the end of the adverse notice period if the household requests a fair hearing during the advance notice period.

- (E) If the State agency determines that a household received more USDA Foods than it was entitled to receive, it must establish a claim against the household in accordance with § 253.9. The initial demand letter for repayment must be provided to the household at the same time the notice of adverse action is issued. It may be combined with the notice of adverse action.

(c) **Reporting changes.**

- (1) The State agency must develop procedures for how changes in household circumstances are reported. Changes reported over the telephone or in person must be acted on in the same manner as those reported in writing. Participating households are required to report the following changes within 10 calendar days after the change becomes known to the household:
 - (i) A change in household composition;
 - (ii) An increase in gross monthly income of more than \$100;
 - (iii) A change in residence;
 - (iv) When the household no longer incurs a shelter and utility expense; or
 - (v) A change in the legal obligation to pay child support.
- (2) If the State agency determines that the household is no longer eligible or reduces the amount of USDA Foods due the household because the household has lost a member or members, the State agency shall provide the household with a notice of adverse action not later than ten days after the change is reported. If the reported change increases the amount of USDA Foods due the household, the household shall be notified that the increase shall be effective not later than the month following the date the change was reported.

(d) **Recertification.**

- (1) The State agency shall develop a procedure for notifying the household prior to or shortly after the end of its certification period that the household must reapply and be recertified for continued participation. Households shall also be notified of the date upon which termination from participation will be effective should the household fail to reapply before the expiration of the certification period.
- (2) The State agency shall approve or deny a household's application for recertification and notify the household of that determination prior to the expiration of the household's current certification period. Households applying for recertification in the last month of the current certification period must be provided an opportunity to obtain USDA Foods distribution on an uninterrupted basis.
- (3) The State agency shall continue distribution of USDA Foods to the household denied at the point of recertification if the household timely requests a fair hearing.

(e) **Controls for dual participation —**

- (1) **Prohibition on dual participation.** No household shall be allowed to participate simultaneously in SNAP and the Food Distribution Program. The State agency shall inform each applicant household of this prohibition and shall develop a method to detect dual participation. The method developed by the State agency shall, at a minimum, employ lists of currently certified households provided by and provided to the appropriate SNAP agency on a monthly basis. The State agency may also employ

computer checks, address checks and telephone calls to prevent dual participation. The State agency shall coordinate with the appropriate SNAP agency or agencies in developing controls for dual participation.

- (2) **Choice of programs.** Households eligible for either SNAP or the Food Distribution Program on reservations on which both programs are available may elect to participate in either program. Such households may elect to participate in one program, and subsequently elect the other at the end of the certification period. Households may also elect to switch from one program to the other program within a certification period only by terminating their participation and notifying the State agency of their intention to switch programs. Households certified in either the Food Distribution Program or SNAP on the first day of the month can only receive benefits in the program for which they are currently certified during that month. At the point the household elects to change programs, the household should notify the State agency of its intent to switch programs and should file an application for the program in which it wishes to participate. Households voluntarily withdrawing from one program with the intent of switching to the other shall have their eligibility terminated for the program in which they are currently certified on the last day of the month in which the household notifies the State agency of its intent to change programs. Entitlement in the program for which a household is now filing an application, if all eligibility criteria are met, would begin in the month following the month of termination in the previous program.

(f) **Treatment of disqualified household members.**

- (1) The following are not eligible to participate in the Food Distribution Program:
- (i) Household members disqualified from the Food Distribution Program for an intentional program violation under § 253.8. These household members may participate, if otherwise eligible, in the Food Distribution Program once the period of disqualification has ended.
 - (ii) Household members disqualified from SNAP for an intentional program violation under § 273.16 of this chapter. These household members may participate, if otherwise eligible, in the Food Distribution Program once the period of disqualification under SNAP has ended. The State agency must, in cooperation with the appropriate SNAP agency, develop a procedure that ensures that these household members are identified.
 - (iii) Households disqualified from the Food Distribution Program for failure to pay an overissuance claim. The circumstances under which a disqualification is allowed for such failure are specified in FNS Handbook 501.
- (2) During the time a household member is disqualified, the eligibility and food distribution benefits of any remaining household members will be determined as follows:
- (i) **Income.** A pro rata share of the income of the disqualified member will be counted as income to the remaining members. This pro rata share is calculated by dividing the disqualified member's earned (less the 20 percent earned income deduction) and unearned income evenly among all household members, including the disqualified member. All but the disqualified member's share is counted as income to the remaining household members.
 - (ii) **Eligibility and benefits.** The disqualified member will not be included when determining the household's size for purposes of assigning food distribution benefits to the household or for purposes of comparing the household's net monthly income with the income eligibility standards.

(g) **Joint processing PA/GA.**

- (1) State agencies which are responsible for and administer both the Food Distribution and public assistance (PA) or general assistance (GA) programs on Indian reservations may allow a household to apply for the Food Distribution Program at the same time the household applies for PA or GA benefits. However, while PA households are categorically eligible, GA households except for those households in GA programs which have been determined by FNS to have criteria of need the same as, or similar to those under federally aided public assistance programs as provided for in § 253.6(c)(2) shall have their eligibility for USDA Foods based solely on Food Distribution eligibility criteria. All criteria provided in this paragraph (f), are applicable to State agencies which administer both the Food Distribution and assistance programs and which elect joint processing. Under joint processing, the State agency shall use joint application forms that contain all the information needed to determine eligibility for USDA Foods or shall attach a form for the other needed information.
- (2) The State agency shall process all applications for PA or GA as applications for the Food Distribution Program as well, unless the household clearly indicates on a space on the application that the household does not want USDA Foods. The State agency shall conduct a single interview for PA or GA and Food Distribution Program eligibility, unless the State agency is unable to do so within the Food Distribution Program processing standards specified in paragraphs (a)(7) and (a)(9) of this section. In such cases the State agency shall provide separate certification for PA or GA and Food Distribution Program eligibility.
- (3) The State agency may verify those factors of eligibility which must be verified for PA or GA, under PA or GA rules, but must follow the Food Distribution Program rules for all other factors.
- (4) PA households have the same reporting requirements as any other food distribution household. PA households which report a change in circumstances to the PA worker shall be considered to have reported the change for food distribution purposes. All of the requirements pertaining to reporting changes for PA households shall be applied to GA households in project areas where GA and food distribution cases are processed jointly.
- (5) The State agency must follow all Food Distribution Program timeliness rules for certification of households for the Food Distribution Program.

(h) **Fair hearing —**

- (1) **Availability of hearings.** The State agency shall provide a fair hearing to any household aggrieved by any action of the State agency which affects the participation of the household in the Food Distribution Program.
- (2) **Timely action on hearings —**
 - (i) **Time frames for the State agency.** The State agency must conduct the hearing, arrive at a decision, and notify the household of the decision within 60 days of receipt of a request for a fair hearing. The fair hearing decision may result in a change in the household's eligibility or the amount of USDA Foods issued to the household based on household size. The State agency must implement these changes to be effective for the next scheduled distribution of USDA Foods following the date of the fair hearing decision. If the USDA Foods are normally made available to the household within a specific period of time (for example, from the first day of the month through the tenth day of the month), the effective date of the disqualification will be the first day of that period.

- (ii) **Household requests for postponement.** The household may request and is entitled to receive, a postponement of the scheduled hearing. The postponement shall not exceed 30 days and, the time limit for action on the decision may be extended for as many days as the hearing is postponed.
- (3) **Notification of right to request hearing.** At the time of application, each household shall be informed of its right to a hearing, of the method by which a hearing may be requested, and that its case may be presented by a household member or a representative, such as a legal counsel, a relative, a friend or other spokesperson. If there is an individual or organization available which provides free legal representation, the household shall also be informed of the availability of that service. Hearing procedures shall be published by the State agency and made available to any interested party.
- (4) **Time period for requesting hearing.** A household shall be allowed to request a hearing on any action by the State agency which occurred in the prior 90 days or which affects current benefits.
- (5) **Request for hearing.** A request for a hearing is any clear expression, oral or written, by the household or its representative to the State agency that it wishes to present its case to a higher authority. The freedom to make such a request shall not be limited or interfered with in any way. Upon request, the State agency shall make available without charge the specific materials necessary for a household or its representative to determine whether a hearing should be requested or to prepare for a hearing.
- (6) **Denial or dismissal of request for hearing.** The State agency shall not deny or dismiss a request for a hearing unless:
 - (i) The request is not received within the time period specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section;
 - (ii) The request is withdrawn in writing by the household or its representative; or
 - (iii) The household or its representative fails, without good cause, to appear at the scheduled hearing.
- (7) **Notification of time and place of hearing.** The time, date and place of the hearing shall be convenient to the household. At least 15 days prior to the hearing, advance written notice shall be provided to all parties involved to permit adequate preparation of the case. The notice shall:
 - (i) Advise the household or its representative of the name, address, and the phone number of the person to notify in the event it is not possible for the household to attend the scheduled hearing.
 - (ii) Specify that the State agency will dismiss the hearing request if the household or its representative fails to appear for the hearing without good cause.
 - (iii) Include the State agency hearing procedures and any other information that would provide the household with an understanding of the proceedings, and that would contribute to the effective presentation of the household's case.
 - (iv) Explain that the household or representative may examine the casefile prior to the hearing.
- (8) **Hearing official.** Hearings shall be conducted by an impartial official(s), designated by the State agency, who does not have any personal interest or involvement in the case and who was not directly involved in the initial determination of the action which is being contested. The hearing official shall:
 - (i) Administer oaths or affirmations if required by the State;
 - (ii) Ensure that all relevant issues are considered;

- (iii) Request, receive and make part of the record all evidence determined necessary to decide the issues being raised;
 - (iv) Regulate the conduct and course of the hearing consistent with due process to ensure an orderly hearing; and
 - (v) Render a hearing decision in the name of the State agency, in accordance with paragraph (g)(11) of this section, which will resolve the dispute.
- (9) **Attendance at hearing.** The hearing shall be attended by a representative of the State agency which initiated the action being contested and by the household and/or its representative. The hearing may also be attended by friends or relatives of the household upon household consent.
- (10) **Conduct of hearing.** The household may not be familiar with the rules of order and it may be necessary to make particular efforts to arrive at the facts of the case in a manner that makes the household feel most at ease. The household or its representative must be given adequate opportunity to:
- (i) Examine all documents and records to be used at the hearing at a reasonable time before the date of the hearing, as well as during the hearing. The contents of the casefile, including the application forms and documents of verification used by the State agency shall be made available, provided the confidential information is protected from release. The State agency shall provide a free copy of the relevant portions of the casefile if requested by the household or its representative. Confidential information that is protected from release and other documents or records which the household will not otherwise have an opportunity to contest or challenge shall not be introduced at the hearing or affect the hearing official's decision.
 - (ii) Present the case or have it presented by a legal counsel or other person.
 - (iii) Bring witnesses.
 - (iv) Advance arguments without undue interference.
 - (v) Question or refute any testimony or evidence, including an opportunity to confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses.
 - (vi) Submit evidence to establish all pertinent facts and circumstances in the case.
- (11) **Hearing decisions.**
- (i) Decisions of the hearing officials shall comply with Federal law or regulations and shall be based on the hearing record. The verbatim transcript or recording of testimony and exhibits or an official report containing the substance of what transpired at the hearing, together with all papers and requests filed in the proceeding, shall constitute the exclusive record for a final decision by the hearing official.
 - (ii) A decision by the hearing official shall be binding on the State agency and shall summarize the facts of the case, specify the reasons for the decision and identify the supporting evidence and the pertinent FNS regulations. The decision shall become a part of the record.
 - (iii) Within 10 days of the date the fair hearing decision is issued, the State agency must issue a notice to the household advising it of the decision.
 - (A) If the decision upheld the adverse action by the State agency, the notice must advise the household of the right to pursue judicial review.

- (B) If the decision upheld a disqualification, the notice must also include the reason for the decision, the date the disqualification will take effect, and the duration of the disqualification (that is, 12 months; 24 months; or permanent). The State agency must also advise any remaining household members if the household's benefits will change, or if the household is no longer eligible as a result of the disqualification.
- (iv) The State agency must revise the demand letter for repayment issued previously to the household to include the value of all overissued USDA Foods provided to the household during the appeal process, unless the fair hearing decision specifically requires the cancellation of the claim. The State agency must also advise the household that collection action on the claim will continue, in accordance with FNS Handbook 501, unless suspension is warranted.
- (12) **Agency conferences.**
 - (i) The State agency shall offer agency conferences to households which request an immediate resolution by a higher authority of a denial of eligibility for food distribution benefits. The State agency may also offer agency conferences to households adversely affected by any agency action. The State agency shall advise households that use of an agency conference is optional and that such use shall in no way delay or replace the fair hearing process. The agency conferences may be attended by the eligibility worker responsible for the agency action, and shall be attended by an eligibility supervisor and/or the agency director, as well as the household and/or its representative. An agency conference may lead to an informal resolution of the dispute. However, a fair hearing must still be held if requested by the household.
 - (ii) An agency conference for households requesting an immediate resolution by a higher authority of an eligibility issue shall be scheduled within four working days of the request unless the household requests that it be scheduled later or states that it does not wish to have an agency conference.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 0584-0071)

(44 U.S.C. 3506)

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979, as amended at 47 FR 746, Jan. 7, 1982. Redesignated and amended by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982; 64 FR 73383, Dec. 30, 1999; 65 FR 47833, Aug. 4, 2000; 75 FR 4473, Jan. 28, 2010; 78 FR 52831, Aug. 27, 2013; 89 FR 87256, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.8 Administrative disqualification procedures for intentional program violation.

- (a) **What is an intentional program violation?** An intentional program violation is considered to have occurred when a household member knowingly, willingly, and with deceitful intent:
 - (1) Makes a false or misleading statement, or misrepresents, conceals, or withholds facts in order to obtain Food Distribution Program benefits which the household is not entitled to receive; or
 - (2) Commits any act that violates a Federal statute or regulation relating to the acquisition or use of Food Distribution Program USDA Foods.
- (b) **What are the disqualification penalties for an intentional program violation?** Household members determined by the State agency to have committed an intentional program violation will be ineligible to participate in the program:

- (1) For a period of 12 months for the first violation;
 - (2) For a period of 24 months for the second violation; and
 - (3) Permanently for the third violation.
- (c) **Who can be disqualified?** Only the household member determined to have committed the intentional program violation can be disqualified. However, the disqualification may affect the eligibility of the household as a whole, as addressed under paragraphs (e)(5) and (h) of this section.
- (d) **Can the disqualification be appealed?** Household members determined by the State agency to have committed an intentional program violation may appeal the disqualification, as provided under § 253.7(h)(1).
- (e) **What are the State agency's responsibilities?**
- (1) Each State agency must implement administrative disqualification procedures for intentional program violations that conform to this section.
 - (2) The State agency must inform households in writing of the disqualification penalties for intentional program violations each time they apply for benefits, including recertifications. This notice must also advise households that an intentional program violation may be referred to authorities for prosecution.
 - (3) The State agency must attempt to substantiate all suspected cases of intentional program violation. An intentional program violation is considered to be substantiated when the State agency has clear and convincing evidence demonstrating that a household member committed one or more acts of intentional program violation, as defined in paragraph (a) of this section.
 - (4) Within 10 days of substantiating that a household member has committed an intentional program violation, the State agency must provide the household member with a notice of disqualification, as described in paragraph (f) of this section. A notice must still be issued in instances where the household member is not currently eligible or participating in the program.
 - (5) The State agency must advise any remaining household members if the household's benefits will change or if the household will no longer be eligible as a result of the disqualification.
 - (6) The State agency must provide the household member to be disqualified with an opportunity to appeal the disqualification through a fair hearing, as required by § 253.7(h).
 - (7) The State agency must refer all substantiated cases of intentional program violations to Tribal, Federal, State, or local authorities for prosecution under applicable statutes. However, a State agency that has conferred with its legal counsel and prosecutors to determine the criteria for acceptance for possible prosecution is not required to refer cases that do not meet the prosecutors' criteria.
 - (8) The State agency must establish claims, and pursue collection as appropriate, on all substantiated cases of intentional program violation in accordance with § 253.9.
- (f) **What are the requirements for the notice of disqualification?**
- (1) Within 10 days of substantiating the intentional program violation, the State agency must issue to the household member a notice of disqualification. The notice must allow an advance notice period of at least 10 days. The disqualification must begin with the next scheduled distribution of USDA

Foods that follows the expiration of the advance notice period, unless the household member requests a fair hearing. A notice must still be issued in instances where the household member is not currently eligible or participating in the program.

- (2) The notice must conform to the requirements of § 253.7(b)(3)(iii)(C) for notices of adverse action.

(g) ***What are the appeal procedures for administrative disqualifications? –***

- (1) ***Appeal rights.*** The household member has the right to request a fair hearing to appeal the disqualification in accordance with the procedures at § 253.7(h).
- (2) ***Notification of hearing.*** The State agency must provide the household member with a notification of the time and place of the fair hearing as described in § 253.7(h)(7). The notice must also include:
 - (i) A warning that if the household member fails to appear at the hearing, the hearing decision will be based solely on the information provided by the State agency; and
 - (ii) A statement that the hearing does not prevent the Tribal, Federal, State, or local government from prosecuting the household member in a civil or criminal court action, or from collecting any overissuance(s).

(h) ***What are the procedures for applying disqualification penalties?***

- (1) If the household member did not request a fair hearing, the disqualification must begin with the next scheduled distribution of USDA Foods that follows the expiration of the advance notice period of the notice of adverse action. If the USDA Foods are normally made available to the household within a specific period of time (for example, from the first day of the month through the tenth day of the month), the effective date of the disqualification will be the first day of that period. The State agency must apply the disqualification period (that is, 12 months, 24 months, or permanent) specified in the notice of disqualification. The State agency must advise any remaining household members if the household's benefits will change or if the household is no longer eligible as a result of the disqualification.
- (2) If the household member requested a fair hearing and the disqualification was upheld by the fair hearing official, the disqualification must begin with the next scheduled distribution of USDA Foods that follows the date the hearing decision is issued. If the USDA Foods are normally made available to the household within a specific period of time (for example, from the first day of the month through the tenth day of the month), the effective date of the disqualification will be the first day of that period. The State agency must apply the disqualification period (that is, 12 months, 24 months, or permanent) specified in the notice of disqualification. No further administrative appeal procedure exists after an adverse fair hearing decision. The decision by a fair hearing official is binding on the State agency. The household member, however, may seek relief in a court having appropriate jurisdiction. As provided under § 253.7(h)(11)(iii)(B), the State agency must advise any remaining household members if the household's benefits will change, or if the household is no longer eligible as a result of the disqualification.
- (3) Once a disqualification has begun, it must continue uninterrupted for the duration of the penalty period (that is, 12 months; 24 months; or permanent). Changes in the eligibility of the disqualified household member's household will not interrupt or shorten the disqualification period.

- (4) The same act of intentional program violation continued over a period of time will not be separated so that more than one penalty can be imposed. For example, a household intentionally fails to report that a household member left the household, resulting in an overissuance of benefits for 5 months. Although the violation occurred over a period of 5 months, only one penalty will apply to this single act of intentional program violation.
- (5) If the case was referred for Tribal, Federal, State, or local prosecution and the court of appropriate jurisdiction imposed a disqualification penalty, the State agency must follow the court order.

[64 FR 73384, Dec. 30, 1999, as amended at 89 FR 87257, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.9 Claims against households.

(a) *What are the procedures for establishing a claim against a household for an overissuance?*

- (1) The State agency must establish a claim against any household that has received more Food Distribution Program USDA Foods than it was entitled to receive.
- (2) The procedures for establishing and collecting claims against households are specified in FNS Handbook 501, The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

(b) *Who is responsible for repaying a household overissuance claim?*

- (1) All adult household members are jointly and separately liable for the repayment of the value of any overissuance of Food Distribution Program benefits to the household.
- (2) Responsibility for repayment continues even in instances where the household becomes ineligible or is not participating in the program.

[64 FR 73385, Dec. 30, 1999, as amended at 89 FR 87257, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.10 USDA Foods inventory management, storage, and distribution.

- (a) **Control and accountability.** The State agency shall be responsible for the issuance of USDA Foods to households and the control of and accountability for the USDA Foods upon its acceptance of the USDA Foods at time and place of delivery.
- (b) **USDA Foods inventories.** The State agency shall, in cooperation with the FNS Regional office, develop an appropriate procedure for determining and monitoring the level of USDA Foods inventories at storage facilities and at each local distribution point. The State agency shall maintain the inventories at proper levels taking into consideration, among other factors, household preferences and the historical and projected volume of distribution at each site. The procedures shall provide that USDA Foods inventories at each storage facility and each local distribution point are not in excess, but are adequate for, an uninterrupted distribution of USDA Foods.
- (c) **Inventory management and control.** The State agency shall as a minimum ensure that: all USDA Foods are stored and inventory is maintained per §§ 250.12 and 250.14 of this chapter.
- (d) **Distribution.** The State agency shall distribute USDA Foods only to households eligible to receive them under this part. If the State agency uses any other agency, administration, bureau, service, or similar organization to effect or assist in the certification of households or distribution of USDA Foods, the State agency shall impose upon such organization responsibility for determining that households to whom

USDA Foods are distributed are eligible under this part. The State agency shall not delegate to any such organization its responsibilities to the Department for overall management and control of the Food Distribution Program. The State agency shall as a minimum ensure that:

- (1) Notification is provided to certified households of the location of distribution sites and days and hours of distribution.
 - (2) An adequate supply of USDA Foods which are available from the Department is on hand at all distribution sites.
 - (3) Sufficient distribution sites, either stationary or mobile, are geographically located or routed in relation to population density of eligible households.
 - (4) Days and hours of distribution are sufficient for caseload size and convenience.
 - (5) Households are advised they may refuse any USDA Foods not desired, even if the USDA Foods are prepackaged by household size.
 - (6) Emergency issuance of USDA Foods will be made to households certified for expedited service in accordance with the provisions of § 253.7(a)(9).
 - (7) Eligible households or authorized representatives are identified prior to the issuance of USDA Foods.
 - (8) Authorized signatures are obtained for USDA Foods issued and the issue date recorded.
 - (9) Posters are conspicuously displayed advising program participants to accept only those USDA Foods, and in such quantities, as will be consumed by them.
 - (10) Complete and current records are kept of all USDA Foods received, issued, transferred, and on hand and of any inventory overages, shortages, and losses.
 - (11) A list of USDA Foods offered by the Department is displayed at distribution sites so that households may indicate preferences for future orders.
- (e) **Improper distribution or loss of or damage of USDA Foods.** State agencies shall take action to obtain restitution in connection with claims arising in their favor for improper distribution, use or loss, or damage of USDA Foods in accordance with §§ 250.16 and 250.17 of this chapter.
- (f) **Damaged or out-of-condition USDA Foods.** The State agency shall immediately notify the appropriate FNS Regional Office if any USDA Foods are found to be damaged or out-of-condition at the time of arrival, or at any subsequent time, whether due to latent defects or any other reason. The FNS Regional Office shall advise the State agency of the appropriate action to be taken with regard to such USDA Foods. If the USDA Foods are declared unfit for human consumption in accordance with § 250.15 of this chapter, they shall be disposed of as provided for under that section. When out-of-condition USDA Foods do not create a hazard to other food at the same location, they shall not be disposed of until the FNS Regional Office or the responsible contractor approves. When circumstances require prior disposal of USDA Foods, the quantity and manner of disposition shall be reported to the appropriate FNS Regional Office. If any damaged or out-of-condition USDA Foods are inadvertently issued to a household and are rejected or returned by the household because the USDA Foods were unsound at the time of issuance and not because the household failed to provide proper storage, care or handling, the State agency shall replace the damaged or out-of-condition USDA Foods with the same or similar kind of USDA Foods which are sound and in good condition. The State agency shall account for such replacements on its monthly inventory report.

[89 FR 87257, Oct. 31, 2024]

§ 253.11 Administrative funds.

- (a) **Allocation of administrative funds to FNS Regional Offices.** Each fiscal year, after enactment of a program appropriation for the full fiscal year and apportionment of funds by the Office of Management and Budget, administrative funds will be allocated to each FNS Regional Office for further allocation to State agencies. To the extent practicable, administrative funds will be allocated to FNS Regional Offices in the following manner:
 - (1) 65 percent of all administrative funds available nationally will be allocated to each FNS Regional Office in proportion to its share of the total number of participants nationally, averaged over the three previous fiscal years; and
 - (2) 35 percent of all administrative funds available nationally will be allocated to each FNS Regional Office in proportion to its share of the total current number of State agencies administering the program nationally.
- (b) **Allocation of administrative funds to State agencies.** Prior to receiving administrative funds, State agencies must submit a proposed budget reflecting planned administrative costs to the appropriate FNS Regional Office for approval. Planned administrative costs must be allowable under part 277 of this chapter. To the extent that funding levels permit, the FNS Regional Office allocates to each State agency administrative funds necessary to cover no less than 80 percent of approved administrative costs.
- (c) **State agency matching requirement.** State agencies must match administrative funds allocated to them as follows:
 - (1) Unless Federal administrative funding is approved at a rate higher than 80 percent of approved administrative costs, in accordance with paragraph (c)(3) of this section, each State agency must contribute 20 percent of its total approved administrative costs. Cash or non-cash contributions, including third party in-kind contributions, and the value of services rendered by volunteers, may be used to meet the State agency matching requirement. Funds provided from another Federal source may be used to meet the State agency matching requirement, provided that such use is consistent with the purpose of those funds and complies with this subsection. To use funds from another Federal source, the State agency must submit documentation for approval to the FNS Regional Office which shows the source, value, and purpose of those funds. In accordance with part 277 of this chapter, such contributions must:
 - (i) Be verifiable;
 - (ii) Be necessary and reasonable to accomplish program objectives;
 - (iii) Be allowable under part 277 of this chapter; and
 - (iv) Be included in the approved budget.
 - (2) Upon request from a State agency, an FNS Regional Office may approve a waiver reducing a State agency's matching requirement below 20 percent. To request a waiver, the State agency must submit compelling justification for the waiver to the appropriate FNS Regional Office. Compelling justification is based on either financial inability to meet the match requirement or the match requirement imposing a substantial burden. The request for the match waiver must be submitted with the following and in accordance with other FNS instructions:

- (i) For a waiver based on financial inability, a summary statement and recent financial documents showing that the State agency is unable to meet the 20 percent matching requirement and that additional administrative funds are necessary for the effective operation of the program; or
 - (ii) For a waiver based on substantial burden, a signed letter from the leadership of the State agency or, in the case of an Indian Tribal Organization, from the leadership of the Tribal agency that oversees the Food Distribution Program, describing why meeting the 20 percent matching requirement would impose a substantial burden on the State agency, and why additional administrative funds are necessary for the effective operation of the program, along with supporting documentation, as needed.
- (3) The FNS Regional Office may not reduce any benefits or services to State agencies that are granted a waiver.
- (d) **Use of funds by State agencies.** Any funds received under this section shall be used only for costs that are allowable under part 277 of this chapter, and that are incurred in operating the food distribution program. Such funds may not be used to pay costs that are, or may be, paid with funds provided from other Federal sources.
- (e) **Application for funds.**
 - (1) Any State agency administering a Food Distribution Program that desires to receive administrative funds under this section shall submit form SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance," to the appropriate FNS Regional Office at least three months prior to the beginning of a Federal fiscal year. The application shall include budget information, reflecting by category of expenditure the State agency's best estimate of the total amount to be expended in the administration of the program during the fiscal year. FNS may require that detailed information be submitted by the State agency to support or explain the total estimated amounts shown for each budget cost category. As required by 2 CFR part 200, subpart D, and USDA implementing regulations 2 CFR part 400 and part 415, agencies of State government shall submit the application for Federal assistance to the State clearinghouse before submitting it to the FNSRO. ITOs shall not be subject to this requirement.
 - (2) Approval of the application by FNS shall be a prerequisite to the payment of any funds to State agencies.
- (f) **Availability of funds.**
 - (1) FNS shall review and evaluate the budget information submitted by the State agency in relationship to the State agency's plan of operation and any other factors which may be relevant to FNS' determination as to whether the estimated expenditures itemized by budget category are reasonable and justified. FNS shall give written notification to the State agency of
 - (i) its approval or disapproval of any or all of the itemized expenditures,
 - (ii) the amount of funds which will be made available, and
 - (iii) the period for which funds are available.
 - (2) FNS shall review and evaluate applications submitted by State agencies for administrative funds available under this section in the following order of priority and shall give preference in making payments of funds under this section in the same order of priority:
 - (i) Applications from State agencies which desire to continue a Food Distribution Program now in operation,

- (ii) Applications from State agencies, in the order received, which FNS determines are immediately capable of effectively and efficiently administering the Program, and
- (iii) Applications from other States agencies, in the order received.

(g) **Method of payment to State agencies.**

- (1) Payments are made to State agencies through a Letter of Credit or an advance by Treasury check. The Letter of Credit funding method shall be used by FNS except when the advances to be made within a 12 month period are estimated to be less than \$120,000. However, FNS may, at its option, reimburse a State agency by Treasury check regardless of the amount in response to a valid claim submitted by the State agency.
- (2) The Letter of Credit funding method shall be done in conjunction with Treasury Department procedures, Treasury Circular No. 1075 and through an appropriate Treasury Regional Disbursing Office (RDO). The Standard Form 183, "Request for Payment on Letter of Credit and Status of Funds Report," shall be correctly prepared and certified by a duly appointed official of the State for requesting payment from an RDO.
- (3) The advance by Treasury check method shall be done by use of the Standard Form 270, "Request for Advance or Reimbursement," and procedures associated with its use. State agencies receiving payments under this method may request payments before cash outlays are made.
- (4) Any State agency receiving payment under the Letter of Credit method or the advance by Treasury check method shall have in place and in operation, a financial management system which meets the standards for fund control and accountability prescribed in part 277 of this chapter, as amended. The State agency shall demonstrate on a continuing basis its willingness and ability to have and to function within procedures that will minimize the time lapse between the transfer of funds and its disbursement to meet obligations. For any State agency which does not meet the requirement of this paragraph, the reimbursement by Treasury check method shall be the preferred method for FNS to make payments to that State agency.

(h) **Accounting for funds.** Each State agency which receives administrative funds under this section shall establish and maintain an effective system of fiscal control and accounting procedures. Expenditures and accountability of such funds shall be in accordance with the appropriate provisions of part 277. The accounting procedures maintained by the State agency shall be such as to accurately reflect the receipt, expenditure and current balance of funds provided by FNS and to facilitate the prompt preparation of reports required by FNS. The accounting procedures shall also provide for segregation of costs specifically identifiable to the Food Distribution Program from any other costs incurred by the State agency. Any budget revisions by a State agency which require the transfer of funds from an approved cost category to another shall be in accordance with the budget revision procedures set forth in 2 CFR part 200, subpart D and USDA implementing regulations 2 CFR part 400 and part 415, and shall be approved by FNS prior to any transfer of funds.

(i) **Return, reduction, and reallocation of funds.**

- (1) FNS may require State agencies to return, during the period of performance of their administrative grant and after receipt of administrative funds, any or all unobligated funds received under this section, and may reduce the amount it has apportioned or agreed to pay to any State agency if FNS determines that:

- (i) The State agency is not administering the Food Distribution Program in accordance with its plan of operation approved by FNS and the provisions of this part, or
 - (ii) The amount of funds which the State agency requested from FNS is in excess of actual need, based on reports of expenditures and current projections of Program needs.
 - (iii) Circumstances or conditions justify the return reallocation or transfer of funds to accomplish the purpose of this part.
- (2) The State agency shall return to FNS, within ninety (90) days following the close of the period of performance of each administrative grant, any funds received under this section which are unobligated at that time.

(j) **Records, reports, audits.**

- (1) The State agency shall:
- (i) Keep such accounts and records as may be necessary to enable FNS to determine whether there has been compliance with this section, and
 - (ii) Adhere to the retention and custodial requirements for records set forth in § 277.4 of this chapter.
- (2) The State agency receiving funds either through a Treasury RDO Letter of Credit system or Treasury check shall submit quarterly reports to FNS on Form SF-425, "Financial Status Report," by the 30th day after close of the reporting quarter and shall submit such other reports as may be required by FNS.
- (3) The appropriate provisions of part 277 are adaptable to this section for additional guidance.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 0584-0071)

(44 U.S.C. 3506)

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979, as amended at 47 FR 746, Jan. 7, 1982. Redesignated and amended by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982, as amended at 62 FR 53731, Oct. 16, 1997. Redesignated at 64 FR 73385, Dec. 30, 1999, as amended at 77 FR 50907, Aug. 23, 2012; 81 FR 66498, Sept. 28, 2016; 84 FR 45877, Sept. 3, 2019; 85 FR 42303, July 14, 2020]

§ 253.12 Administrative waivers.

- (a) The Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service may waive or modify specific regulatory provisions contained in this part for one or more State agencies. Waivers may be issued only in the following situations:
- (1) The specific regulatory provision cannot be implemented due to extraordinary temporary situations;
 - (2) FNS determines that the waiver would result in a more effective and efficient administration of the program; or
 - (3) Unique geographic conditions within the geographic area served by the administering agency preclude effective implementation of the specific regulatory provision and require an alternate procedure.
- (b) FNS shall not approve waivers when:

- (1) The waiver would be inconsistent with the provisions of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008; or
 - (2) The waiver would result in material impairment of any statutory or regulatory rights of participants or potential participants.
- (c) FNS shall approve waivers for a period not to exceed one year unless the waiver is for an on-going situation. If the waiver is requested for longer than a year, appropriate justification shall be required and FNS will determine if a longer period is warranted and if so, the duration of the waiver. Extensions may be granted provided that State agencies submit appropriate justification to FNS.
- (d) When submitting requests for waivers, State agencies shall provide compelling justification for the waiver in terms of how the waiver will meet the conditions of paragraphs (a)(1), (2), and/or (3) of this section. At a minimum, requests for waivers shall include but not necessarily be limited to:
- (1) Reasons why the waiver is needed;
 - (2) Anticipated impact on service to participants or potential participants who would be affected;
 - (3) Anticipated time period for which the waiver is needed; and
 - (4) Thorough explanation of the proposed alternative provision to be used in lieu of the waived or modified regulatory provision.

[89 FR 87258, Oct. 31, 2024]