

FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
BENEFIT, EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION

1. WHAT ARE FOOD STAMPS?

Food stamp benefits can be used like cash at authorized grocery stores to buy food (including infant formula and nutritional supplements, i.e, Ensure) and seeds to grow food. They cannot be used to buy tobacco, alcoholic beverages or things you can't eat, such as paper goods.

The Food Stamp Program is run by the State Department of Human Services but the United States Department of Agriculture pays almost all of the costs.

2. WHO CAN GET FOOD STAMPS?

Any household with income and resources below certain limits. A "household" is a person living alone, or a group of people living together who buy food and prepare meals together. While most households are families, other groups of people who are not related to each other can also be a household.

3. WHO CANNOT GET FOOD STAMPS?

Boarders, strikers, and people in institutions are not eligible. Also, students in an institution of higher education, between the ages of 18 and 49 are ineligible unless they are disabled, work at least half-time, participate in a federal work-study program, be fully or independently responsible for the care of a dependent household member under the age of six, or receiving benefits from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

4. ARE SOME HOUSEHOLDS AUTOMATICALLY ELIGIBLE?

Yes. If all members of a household are receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or General Assistance (GA), or all three, the household is eligible for food stamps, unless the entire household is institutionalized or disqualified from receiving food stamps. However, the amount of benefits received will depend upon the household's income and expenses.

5. WHAT ARE RESOURCES?

Resources are the things you own, including cash, checking and savings accounts, stocks and bonds, savings bonds, and one time lump sum payments. Some resources--your house, vehicles, personal belongings, household goods, and life insurance policies--may not be counted at all.

6. WHAT IS INCOME?

Income includes all sources of money or benefits such as earnings, Social Security, Supplementary Security Income, pensions, support and alimony, Unemployment Insurance Benefits, disability benefits, Workmen's Compensation, welfare payments, dividends, etc. It does not include vendor payments, or payments made to some other person in your behalf.

7. WILL ALL OF YOUR INCOME BE COUNTED?

No. You can deduct an earned income deduction from your wages to cover work-related expenses and payroll taxes. Additionally, a monthly deduction will be subtracted from your income as a standard deduction.

A deduction for actual costs up to an established maximum may be allowed for dependent or child care costs and/or high shelter and utility expenses (that is, your rent or mortgage plus utilities and telephone that add up to more than 50% of your income after the other deductions have been taken). Legally obligated child support payments that are paid by a household member may also be deducted. Those 60 or older, or recipients of SSI or disability benefits may qualify for additional deductions for high shelter and medical costs.

Money earned by a child under 18 who is a student at least half-time in an elementary or secondary school and money from loans are not counted at all. Payments made by agencies or people to another person on your behalf, such as rent payments made by your children who don't live with you, will not be counted.

NOTE: ALL DEDUCTIONS MENTIONED ABOVE ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE PERIODICALLY.

8. HOW MUCH INCOME CAN YOU HAVE?

That depends on your household size and whether your income is under current poverty guidelines. This poverty guideline is also subject to change periodically.

9. ARE THERE OTHER REQUIREMENTS?

Yes. Some household members may have to register for work and may be referred for employment and training services, such as job search, job search skills training, basic education, or vocational training. Some able-bodied persons who are not living with minor children may only be eligible for a limited time unless they meet other requirements. This doesn't apply, however, if you are already working at least 30 hours a week or are unable to work; are under 16 or over 60; or have to take care of a child under 6 or an adult who is house bound.

10. HOW MUCH WILL YOU GET?

That depends on how much income you have. The amount of food stamp benefits you receive is called "an allotment". A household's monthly allotment is equal to the thrifty food plan (which is determined by household size) minus 30% of the household's net income after allowable deductions.

The amount of food stamp benefits a household receives depends on its net income. The higher a household's income, the lower the food stamp benefits will be. If eligible, first month's benefits begin from the date the application is received by the department.

The food stamp allotment and the amount of monthly income you can have may go up periodically to keep up with increases in the price of food.

11. HOW ARE BENEFITS ISSUED?

Food Stamp benefits are issued through an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system. Your benefits will be deposited monthly into your account. You will access your benefits with your EBT card and personal identification number (PIN). Most supermarkets accept the EBT card; however, you may want to check to be sure a store accepts the EBT card before you shop.

12. HOW DO YOU APPLY?

You must fill out an application form and have a face to face interview. You can get an application form by calling or going to one of the welfare offices nearest you. You must be given an application form as soon as you ask for it, and must be allowed to submit it the same day if you wish. (If you are receiving welfare payments, talk to your welfare worker.)

Federal law says that once you fill in your name and address, sign the application and turn it in, the food stamp office must interview you, help you to complete the form, and tell you if you are qualified within 30 days of the date the department receives the form. If you have little or no money and need help right away, let the food stamp office know, because you may be able to get food stamps within a few days.

You may be able to have your interview on the same day you apply, or you may be asked to come back. In order to complete the interview, you should bring with you proof of your income (pay stubs for the past month), rent and utility receipts, and proof of your assets. At the interview, you may be asked to submit other types of proof. If you cannot go to the office for an interview, an adult friend or relative who knows your circumstances may go to be interviewed in your place. Also, if you are 60 or older, disabled or are working and cannot go the office for an interview, a worker will arrange to interview you at home or by telephone. There is a food stamp office on every island. Look in your telephone book under Hawaii State Government, Department of Human Services, Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division for the office nearest you.

13. WHAT IF THE FOOD STAMP OFFICE MAKES A MISTAKE?

If the food stamp office turns you down even though you think you are eligible, makes a mistake in figuring out your income, or takes longer than 30 days to decide on your application, you can ask for a "fair hearing" in writing or orally. You can get or call for an application for fair hearing at your food stamp office. In some cases, you can continue to receive your food stamp benefit without a change while you are waiting for the hearing decision. You will be able to tell your side of the story or point out the mistake. If you win the hearing, you will get back any benefits you lost. If you lose, you may have to pay back.

14. WHERE CAN YOU GET THE FIGURES MENTIONED IN THE ABOVE QUESTIONS?

The nearest food stamp office can tell you what the current figures are. You should contact them if you have any questions.

15. WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL THAT I HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST?

Food stamp benefits are available to anyone without regard to race, color, disability, religious creed, national origin, sex, age or political beliefs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against by the Food Stamp Program, contact USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, S. W. Washington, D. C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD).