

# FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

## FACT SHEET



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

**October 2020**

# Food Assistance Program

## **Program Description**

The Food Assistance Program helps people with low income buy food they need for good health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals and determines the amount of food assistance benefits an individual or family receives. Food assistance benefits are a supplement to a family's food budget. Households may need to spend some of their own cash, along with their food assistance benefits, to buy enough food for a month. Refer to this USDA brochure for an explanation about how food assistance benefits can help a family eat better: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019%20FNS%20313%20SNAP%20English%20for%20508.pdf> .

## **Household Status**

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

## **Residence/Citizenship**

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

## **Social Security Numbers**

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

## **Child Support Cooperation/Child Support Payment Requirements**

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

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

## **Work/Work Registration**

Physically and mentally fit adults age 16 through 59 years old must register for work, accept offers of suitable work, and take part in an employment and training program when referred, if they do not meet an exemption. Healthy adults ages 18 through 49 years old who do not have dependent children can only receive food assistance benefits for three months in a three-year period if they are not working or participating in a work program. For additional information on work requirements for adults ages 18

through 49, refer to DCF's website at <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access-florida/abawdfaq>.

## **Income**

The Food Assistance Program counts most types of income to see if a household is eligible. Households must have their total monthly gross income compared to a percentage of the federal poverty level. Gross income means a household's total income before deductions, not counting money we can exclude. The "Income Chart" below shows the Gross and Net Income limits and the benefit amounts for the number of people in the household.

**Income Chart**

| <b>People in Household</b>     | <b>200% Gross Monthly Income Limits Effective 10/1/20</b> | <b>130% Gross Monthly Income Limits Effective 10/1/20</b> | <b>100% Net Monthly Income Limits Effective 10/1/20</b> | <b>Maximum Benefit Amount Effective 10/1/20</b> |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1                              | \$2,128   | \$1,383   | \$1,064   | \$204   |
| 2                              | \$2,874   | \$1,868   | \$1,437   | \$374   |
| 3                              | \$3,620   | \$2,353   | \$1,810   | \$535   |
| 4                              | \$4,368   | \$2,839   | \$2,184   | \$680   |
| 5                              | \$5,114   | \$3,324   | \$2,557   | \$807   |
| 6                              | \$5,860   | \$3,809   | \$2,930   | \$969   |
| 7                              | \$6,608   | \$4,295   | \$3,304   | \$1,071   |
| 8                              | \$7,354   | \$4,780   | \$3,677   | \$1,224   |
| For Each Additional Person Add | +\$748  | +\$486  | +\$374  | +\$153  |

## **Deductions**

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

- 20% deduction from earned income;
- Standard deduction based on household size;
- Cost of child care when needed to work, seek work or attend training for work;
- Medical expenses more than \$35 for elderly or disabled household members;
- Court ordered child support payments paid to non-household members; or
- A portion of shelter and utility costs

## **Assets**

Examples of assets include: bank accounts, savings bonds, and cash on hand. Most food assistance households are not subject to an asset limit. If a household member becomes disqualified for benefits for breaking Food Assistance Program rules, felony drug trafficking including agreeing, conspiring, combining, or confederating with another person to commit the act on or after 08/22/1996, running away from a felony warrant, or not participating in a work program, the household will be subject to the asset limit. If applicable, the maximum allowable asset limit for households that contain a disqualified member shall not exceed \$2,250 (\$3,500 for households containing at least one elderly or disabled member).

## **Students**

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

- Physically or mentally unfit;
- Receiving Temporary Cash Assistance benefits;
- Participating in a state or federally financed work study program;
- Enrolled in college as a result of participation in a Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program under Title IV of the Social Security Act;
- Working a minimum of 80 hours per month;
- Participating in an on-the-job training program;
- Taking care of a dependent household member under the age of six;
- Taking care of a dependent household member over the age of five but under 12 and do not have adequate child care to enable them to attend school or work a minimum of 80 hours per month, or to take part in a state or federally financed work study program;
- Single parent enrolled full time in college and taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12; or
- Participating or enrolled in specific programs that will assist in obtaining the skills needed for the current job market

## **Foods You Can Buy with Food Assistance Benefits**

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

- Breads and cereals;
- Fruits and vegetables;
- Meats, fish, and poultry;
- Dairy products; and
- Seeds and plants to grow and produce food for the household to eat

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

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

Stores are not allowed to give cash to individuals who receive food assistance benefits or for the return of empty bottles and cans that contained food purchased with food assistance benefits.