



Children's Defense Fund

# Food Stamp FACT SHEET

The Food Stamp Program is the cornerstone of the federal food assistance programs. By permitting low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet by increasing their financial means, the Food Stamp Program achieves its goal of alleviating hunger and malnutrition. Recent changes in Food Stamp Program rules mean that many more working families and immigrants than ever before may qualify.

## Who Participates In The Program?

Currently, over 25 million people receive food stamps throughout the country.

- In New York State:
  - 1.8 million people participate in the Food Stamp Program.
  - 910,000 people who may be eligible are not participating in the program.
  - \$699 million in federal food stamp benefits are unclaimed each year.
- In New York City:
  - 1.1 million people participate in the Food Stamp Program.
  - 528,000 people who may be eligible are not participating in the program.
  - \$431 million in federal food stamp benefits are unclaimed each year.
- Among the potentially eligible but not participating are the working poor, immigrants, and seniors.

## What Are The Benefits?

Receiving the benefit means fewer families in New York have to make difficult choices between providing enough food on the table and paying for heating fuel, housing, childcare, transportation costs to get to work, or dealing with an economic crisis. The average benefit amount in New York is over \$100 per household. Families can use food stamps to buy:

- Any food or food product for human consumption;
- Seeds and plants for use in home gardens to produce food

Benefits are distributed through an electronic card that may be used at authorized retail food stores and farmers market. The benefit amount is 100% federally funded and administrative costs are divided evenly among federal and state/local government.

## What Are The Eligibility Requirements?

Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program is based on financial and non-financial factors. These factors include eligible household size, income, various expenses (deductions) and immigrant status. The program is designed to respond to economic need, granting benefits to households with incomes below 130% of the FPL (except households with elderly or disabled members), and whose resources are limited (\$2,000 per household, \$3000 if someone is elderly or disabled). Resources include checking/savings account, cash, stocks/bonds and certain retirement savings accounts. All households must have net incomes (after allowable food stamp deductions) below 100 percent of poverty to be eligible.

## Gross Income Test - 130% Federal Poverty Level

Effective 10/01/2005 to 9/30/2006

Household Size	Gross Income Per Week	Gross Income Every Two Weeks	Gross Income Per Month
1	\$239	\$477	\$1,037
2	\$321	\$640	\$1,390
3	\$402	\$803	\$1,744
4	\$484	\$966	\$2,097

Work requirements are also a part of the program for individuals without dependants, not disabled and otherwise able to work. These individuals may also have time limits on their receipt of food stamp benefits. Special rules apply to immigrants, students and other groups.

### Are Immigrants Eligible?

On April 1, 2003, many legal immigrants become newly eligible for the Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp Reauthorization Act passed in 2002 restored eligibility to many immigrants. The following is a summary of immigrant eligibility:

- Legal immigrants who are children age 17 and under or disabled adults can now get food stamps
- Legal immigrants who have legally resided in the United States for at least 5 years
- Asylees, refugees and other small groups of immigrants
- Other legal immigrants and any undocumented immigrants are ineligible for food stamp benefits.

### How Do You Apply?

The application process includes completing and filing an application form, being interviewed, and verifying facts necessary to determining eligibility.

There are three primary ways to access the program.

- Apply directly through the local government social services office by applying for cash assistance, Medicaid and food stamps concurrently, using one common application.
- Apply for food stamps alone at a local food stamp-only center using a shortened application form.
- Families and individuals may be pre-screened for eligibility and receive application assistance from a local community agency. The application experience varies from project to project. The most comprehensive assistance may include a computerized prescreening, a completed computer generated application, preparation of documents for verification and an appointment for an initial interview at the local government agency.

**For more information, contact Children's Defense Fund –  
New York at (212) 697-2323.**

*(July 2006)*