

The Food Stamp Program

Program Description

The Food Stamp program began operations in the United States in 1939. Today's program is, for the most part, based on the Food Stamps Act of 1977. The goal of the program is to assist low-income persons and families to purchase food and better meet their nutritional needs. The program is not intended to supply all of a person's or family's food needs--instead it supplements those needs while the person or family makes efforts to become self-supporting.

Funding and Operations

The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, provides states with the funding needed and the policies governing the Food Stamp program. Minnesota's Department of Human Services supervises the program on a state level, clarifies policies, reviews county performance, and distributes monthly benefits. In accordance with state and federal directives, county human service agencies accept client applications, determine eligibility, and determine monthly benefit levels. The Food Stamp program is available in all 87 Minnesota counties.

Participation Requirements

Monthly benefit levels are based on income and the number of persons in the household. Usually, if the household's net income is at or below 130 percent of federal poverty guidelines, the household will qualify for Food Stamp assistance. Also, if the applicant or others in the household qualify for the Statewide Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), General Assistance (GA), or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, the household will also qualify for Food Stamp assistance. Certain food stamp recipients must participate in the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program.

Monthly Benefits

In the past, monthly benefits were issued in the form of Food Stamp coupons. Program recipients then redeemed the coupons for food items at various grocery and convenience stores. Today, monthly benefits are provided through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards that work much like a debit card. At the beginning of the month, the recipient's EBT account is credited with the amount of benefits the person is eligible for. During the month, the person uses the card to purchase food, and the purchase price is deducted from the monthly account balance. Minnesota now provides benefits through an EBT system in all 87 counties.

Coordination With MFIP

Families who receive benefits from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) will have their food assistance needs met through MFIP rather than through the traditional Food Stamp program. Other adults and families that do not receive MFIP benefits will have their food assistance needs met through the traditional Food Stamp program.