



MAR - 4 2009

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

3101 Park
Center Drive

Alexandria, VA
22302-1500

SUBJECT: Clarifications of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
Certification Provisions - Client Notices Questions and Answers #1

TO: Regional Directors
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
All Regions

Attached are questions and answers in response to issues raised by the States, through various discussions, concerning SNAP provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5), which was enacted on February 17, 2009.

Please direct any questions to the appropriate regional contact in the Certification Policy Branch.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Arthur T. Foley".

Arthur T. Foley
Director
Program Development Division

Attachment

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)

Client Notices: Questions and Answers

Section 101(a)(2) Termination of the Temporary Increase

Question 1. Should households be advised of the effects on future benefit increases as part of the mass change notice?

Answer. State agencies can decide how to address benefit changes that occur under ARRA after the April 1, 2009 benefit increase. The higher allotment levels established by the law become a new floor and will not decrease after September 30, 2009. Future allotment adjustments will not automatically occur in October until the value exceeds the April 1, 2009 amounts. This is not forecast to occur this year, and, as a result, households are unlikely to see an adjustment this October. The impact on future years is uncertain. This may lead to some confusion among SNAP households, particularly longer term SNAP recipients who are accustomed to annual increases each October. State agencies may clarify the effect on the October benefit adjustments as part of the mass change notice for the April 1, 2009 benefit increase. A State agency may opt also to explain the effects on the annual adjustment later in the year, closer to when the October increase would normally occur in order to minimize confusion among clients who may have forgotten the information provided in the earlier announcement. Providing clear and sufficient information about this change will likely reduce the number of inquiries received by local offices.

Section 101(b) Requirements for the Secretary (Administrative Requirements)

Question 1. How should households be notified of the SNAP benefit increase?

Answer States have flexibility in determining the best approach to informing households of the April 1 increase in the SNAP benefit amounts. These benefit increases are considered a "mass change" under ARRA and the law "requires a simple process for States to notify households of the increase in benefits." Existing SNAP regulations require that, at a minimum, State agencies publicize these mass changes through the news media; posters in SNAP offices, issuance locations, or other sites where SNAP households are likely to see them; or general notices mailed to SNAP households.

Notifying households is important both to ensure that households are aware of their higher benefits and can start using them immediately, and to reduce the number of telephone calls to caseworkers and EBT call centers. A small investment in notification may substantially reduce the number of client inquiries.

FNS strongly encourages State agencies to use multiple means to inform clients of the April 1 change in order to ensure clients receive this information. A robust strategy will reduce client confusion about the benefit change and minimize the need for local offices to respond to individual client inquiries. In addition to general media and information in local offices, States should consider a prominent notice on State web pages or those of partner agencies and recorded messages during telephone wait times or as part of Interactive Voice Response Systems to reach clients who do not regularly visit an office in-person. States may also opt to include information on the benefit increase along with other notices mailed to clients for recertification or other purposes or with EBT receipts. To assist States, FNS has created templates to inform clients of the stimulus package and impacts on their SNAP benefits. These templates have been forwarded to the Regions and are available on the PartnerWeb.

Although individual mailed notices to households are not required and entail an expense, this approach most effectively ensures that all households receive notice. Additional administrative funds provided under the ARRA may be used for this purpose.