

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 2023

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.us/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 52 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. Florida has expanded the age of individuals subject to mandatory work requirements. Individuals aged 53 through 59, who do not meet an exemption, will now be required to participate in the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program. These individuals will be referred to as mandatory work participants. For additional information on work requirements for adults, refer to DCF's website at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/abawd>.

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.

People in Household	200% Gross Monthly Income Limits Effective 10/1/23	130% Gross Monthly Income Limits Effective 10/1/23	100% Net Monthly Income Limits Effective 10/1/23	Maximum Benefit Amount Effective 10/1/23
1	\$2,430	\$1,580	\$1,215	\$291
2	\$3,288	\$2,137	\$1,644	\$535
3	\$4,144	\$2,694	\$2,072	\$766
4	\$5,000	\$3,250	\$2,500	\$973
5	\$5,858	\$3,807	\$2,929	\$1,155
6	\$6,714	\$4,364	\$3,357	\$1,386
7	\$7,570	\$4,921	\$3,785	\$1,532
8	\$8,428	\$5,478	\$4,214	\$1,751
For Each Additional Person Add	+\$858	+\$557	+\$429	+\$219

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 \$2,750 (\$4,250 for households containing at least one elderly or disabled member). The asset limit for elderly or disabled households also serves as the threshold for substantial lottery or gambling winnings.

SUNCAP Program

The SUNCAP Program is a special Food Assistance Program for individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). For additional information on the SUNCAP Program, refer to DCF's brochure at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2022-11/suncapenglish.pdf>.

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.