

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations provides commodity foods to low-income households living on Indian reservations and to Native American families living in designated areas near reservations. Many Native Americans participate in this commodity program as an alternative to the Food Stamp Program. Locally, Indian tribal organizations administer the program.

To participate, a household must have income and assets within specified limits and live on or near an Indian reservation. Participating households receive a monthly food package either from a central distribution site or by tailgate distribution from a truck. Each household receives foods that are wholesome, nutritious, and easy to use, including meats, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, grains, and cereals. Participants can select from about 60 food items.

Community Involvement

- Does your community or tribal organization participate in the food distribution program?

Active community involvement is critical to educate tribal leaders about eligibility for the food distribution program. Some tribal officials may not know how to file an application to enroll their tribe in the food distribution program.

- If your Native American community is located on or near a reservation that has a food distribution program, do your local agencies and coalitions publicly inform people that they may be eligible to participate in the food distribution program or alternate between the food distribution program and Food Stamp Program?

Some people in your community may not be aware of their potential eligibility and the nutritious food packages they can receive. Some may not know where to go to apply. Some may feel that receipt of commodities labels families as welfare recipients rather than participants of a nutrition assistance program.



- Do members of your community know where to go to apply for the food distribution program or when the tribal organization distributes commodities?
- If your tribal organization participates, does the distributing office accommodate the needs of all people by providing adequate hours of operation, flexible appointment scheduling, delivery to the homebound and rural participants, or assistance with transportation to the distribution site?

Tailgate distribution from a truck is a great way to serve the homebound and outlying areas of your reservation or nearby areas.

Enrollment Assistance

- Does the distributing office provide applications for the food distribution program upon request? **REQUIRED**
- Does the distributing office always inform participants that they can apply the same day they contact the distributing office and that they may be eligible for expedited service? **REQUIRED**
- Does the distributing office notify participants that they may designate an authorized representative? **REQUIRED**

Distributing agencies must provide applications upon request. Clients are entitled to file an application the same day they request one. Distributing agencies must determine program eligibility within 7 calendar days and expedited service within 1 calendar day, excluding weekends and holidays. Also, the head of the household, spouse, or any other responsible member of the household may designate an authorized representative to act on behalf of the household to apply for and obtain commodities.

Referrals

- Does the distributing office have agreements and effective procedures in place with other agencies to refer eligible families to additional services and programs?
- Does the distributing office regularly inform families with children that they may be automatically eligible for free school meals and WIC benefits and refer them to the appropriate office?

People in need seek out assistance in a variety of locations: food pantries, health clinics, and community centers. Program referrals can help meet all client needs as effectively and conveniently as possible. For example, students enrolled in the food distribution programs may be automatically eligible for free school meals. The food distribution office can work actively with school and public health officials to ensure that appropriate agencies share the necessary information to maximize use of the nutrition assistance programs.

Nutrition Education

- Does your tribal community provide nutrition education?
- Does your tribal organization actively cooperate with the Indian Health Service, the extension service and other nutrition educators to improve the effectiveness of nutrition education services?

To help recipients make the most nutritious use of commodity foods, FNS makes important nutrition and health information available to recipients.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ▶ Encourage Indian tribal organizations and State welfare offices to establish outreach programs and service areas.
- ▶ Discuss with tribal officials the importance of the food distribution program to the health and well-being of the people in their communities.
- ▶ Encourage Indian tribal organizations to promote nutrition education to help inform their members how they can alleviate diet-related health problems.

FNS CAN HELP:

- ▶ More information about Food Distribution on Indian Reservations is available at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd.
- ▶ FNS provides information about nutrition and suggestions for making the most nutritious use of commodity foods, including tips on safe food storage and sanitary food preparation methods as well as information on diet-related health conditions and lifestyle issues relevant to Native Americans. We also have published a recipe book, *Quick & Easy Commodity Recipes for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations*. Call your FNS Regional office for more information.
- ▶ Federal funding is also available to Indian Tribal Organizations and State agencies specifically for nutrition education. Tribal organizations can use these funds to provide individual nutrition counseling, conduct cooking demonstrations with program commodities, and develop new recipes and other nutrition education materials. Call your FNS Regional office for more information.