

# FOOD STAMP NOTES



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### Our first issue:

- This is the first issue of *Food Stamp Notes*
- *Food Stamp Notes* gives updates on the Program
- You can submit topics for future issues
- Send us an e-mail at [BRDHQ@fns.usda.gov](mailto:BRDHQ@fns.usda.gov)



**Food Stamps Make America Stronger.**

[www.fns.usda.gov/fsp](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp)

## LETTER TO RETAILERS

Retail food stores make sure people in the community have access to healthy food. FNS is reaching out to over 145,000 stores in the Program to provide better customer service. We want to improve the Food Stamp Program by reducing paperwork, integrating current technology into the Program and forming partnerships with retailer associations.

The Food Stamp Program is the cornerstone of Federal food assistance programs, and currently serves over 20 million low-income people each month. Over 80% of Food Stamp benefits go to households with children.

Food Stamps provide crucial support to low-income households and those who are transitioning from welfare to work. In addition, the Food Stamp Program helps communities by infusing Federal funds into needy areas. The USDA's Economic Research Service determined that \$5 in Food Stamp benefits generates \$9.2 in local economic activity.

Currently, only 62% of eligible people participate in the Program. FNS is engaged in various outreach activities, and retailers can support this effort by encouraging eligible people to apply for

benefits. This edition of Food Stamp Notes contains information on how to obtain free posters for display in your store and how to access the new Food Stamp pre-screening tool to see if a person is eligible for Food Stamp benefits.

We look forward to working with you in the future. Together we can make a healthier difference for needy people!

Kate Coler  
Deputy Administrator  
Food Stamp Program

## EBT—MODERNIZING THE PROGRAM

We remain committed to modernizing Food Stamps through computer systems to improve the Program and make it easier for retailers.

We are pleased to announce that over 95% of Food Stamp benefits are now issued through a debit card system called "Electronic Benefit Transfer" or "EBT."

EBT helps retailers by eliminating the hassle of redeeming paper coupons and making change.



**A SMALL  
REASON TO  
FIND OUT IF  
YOU QUALIFY  
FOR FOOD  
STAMPS.**

Call 1-800-221-5689

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOOD AND NUTRITION ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM

## NEW MATERIALS FOR RETAILERS

There are many new Food Stamp materials available to the public, retailers and community groups. They are free and available in different languages.

The outreach materials for clients—which educate potentially eligible people about the Program—feature the theme:

**Food Stamps Make America Stronger.**

They are designed for the general public, working poor, seniors and immigrants. The materials include fliers, brochures and posters.

To order these outreach materials for clients go to [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp) and click on “food stamp info. materials” and then “order materials online.”

New retailer training materials are also available. They give a consistent, national message about the rules and regulations of the Program. They come in two formats—a video or CD. A written guide comes with each training video or CD. The guide can be ordered separately. To get copies, call your local FNS field office.

*Under the pilot Food Stamp Program, the Muncy family of Paynesville, WV, were the first Food Stamp recipients. On May 29, 1961, they received \$95 in Food Stamps for their 15 person household.*

## FOOD STAMP HISTORY

The “Food Stamp Plan” began in 1939 to help needy families during the Depression era. The modern Program began in 1961 as a pilot project and became a permanent program in 1964.

By 1964, the Program grew from 8 areas to 43 in 22 States with 380,000 participants. From 1969 through 2002, over \$321 billion in Food Stamps were issued using paper coupons.

Between 1978 and 2002 over 62 billion food coupons were printed to meet the American public’s needs.

## COMPLIANCE HELP

As a retailer, you need to know the proper way to handle Food Stamp transactions. You are responsible for the actions of your staff. You will need to train your staff before they begin ringing sales and monitor their performance. You can lose

your authorization if you or your staff do not follow the rules of the Program.

Our new training video and materials can help you teach new hires and conduct refresher courses as necessary.

As a reminder, Food Stamp benefits cannot buy:

- Non-food items
- Vitamins / medicines
- Foods eaten in store
- Hot foods
- Alcohol / tobacco

## FOCUS ON RETAILERS

Steve DeYoung's Big Top Market is an experienced store in the Food Stamp Program. The store is located near Grand Rapids, Michigan and has been authorized since 1969.

Steve DeYoung became a partial owner of his father's store in 1986. He has seen a lot of changes in the grocery industry, especially with the introduc-

tion of EBT cards. When paper food stamps were primarily used, the store had two full-time staff whose primary job was to count and endorse them!

Steve says that Food Stamp recipients have always been a big part of the family's business.

His wife, Wendy, who



has been in the grocery sector since she was 16, agrees.

Wendy believes the Food Stamp Program is improving all the time. "FNS is doing an awesome job. The new retailer video is very well done."



## EBT BENEFITS ARE INTEROPERABLE

States have been working hard to link their EBT systems. Currently, 49 states are connected. If you use state-provided equipment, you can take other cards right now.

Equipment provided by

a third-party processor should also allow interoperability. If not, please contact your EBT service provider and tell them you want to accept cards from other states.

Illinois will be inter-

operable with other states this Fall. Wyoming and Ohio use a different technology so their cards don't work in other states.

*Almost everyone now gets their Food Stamps electronically, but some still have paper coupons. These are still acceptable.*

*If you have trouble depositing paper coupons in your bank account or need \$1 coupons to make change, contact your field office.*

## NEW PRE-SCREENING TOOL

A new online tool is available from USDA to help find out if a person might qualify for Food Stamp benefits.

The pre-screening tool is not an application for Food Stamps, but it can help a person make an informed decision as to

whether they should apply at their local Food Stamp office or not.

The pre-screening tool asks users to enter basic information such as household size and family income. The tool estimates the

user's monthly Food Stamp dollar amount, if the user is eligible. Any information the user enters is kept private.

To see the tool, log onto [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp) and click on "online pre-screening tool."

## USDA Food and Nutrition Service

Retailers should contact their local field office for more information on topics covered in this publication, or log onto [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp) and click on "retailers."

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## USDA Food and Nutrition Service

### Food Stamp Notes

Benefit Redemption Division Room 404  
3101 Park Center Drive  
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) increases food security and reduces hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people with access to food, a healthy diet and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

FNS administers over 15 different nutrition programs that serve the needs of different populations (e.g., families, pregnant women, children, etc.). Log onto the FNS website at [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov) to find out more about the Food Stamp Program and other FNS nutrition assistance programs in your community.

