



## Revised Food Stamp Program Guidance for Self-Initiated Workfare Programs

To: All Regional Administrators, Food and Consumer Service

April 3, 1997

On February 10, 1997, this office issued guidance for self-initiated workfare programs. The purpose of this memorandum is to 1) reinforce that self-initiated programs are comparable to workfare under section 20 of the Food Stamp Act if they meet the revised requirements outlined below; 2) provide additional clarification on comparable workfare requirements; and 3) offer increased flexibility to States to operate comparable programs.

Our original guidance specified that participation in workfare is mandatory, and that participants are subject to sanction for noncompliance. Additionally, that guidance noted the requirement that specifies that work benefits (protections) be made available to workfare participants.

Relative to sanctions, subsequent evaluation of various workfare options disclosed provisions that allow States to offer workfare activities without sanctions. Although these programs are void of sanctions, the consequences for non-participation by ABAWDs are much more severe, as they lose eligibility to receive benefits for any period (beyond the 3 months) in which they do not meet the work requirements.

The issue of work benefits is notable. While the Food and Consumer Service (FCS) encourages States to employ (for comparable workfare programs) the protections established for workfare in section 20 of the Food Stamp Act, we would not prohibit approval of plans that do not offer work protections or reimbursement for participant expenses. This concession supports the State's goal of keeping people, who are willing to work but cannot find jobs, eligible for food stamp benefits.

As discussed in the February 10th memorandum, State agencies may use a range of food stamp allotments and corresponding fixed participation hours in comparable programs--this is in lieu of requiring each participant to work the fixed number of hours equal to the household grant divided by the higher of the Federal or State minimum wage. However, the maximum number of hours associated with a work activity may not exceed the statutory cap of 30 hours weekly.

Under comparable programs, States must ensure that participants do not receive a fourth month of food stamp benefits **(the first month for which they would not be eligible under the time limit)** without having secured a workfare position or having met their workfare obligation. Initially (in most cases) the participant will have to secure a workfare slot early enough in the third month to afford the State agency the opportunity to continue benefits. Subsequent participation must be verified timely to prevent issuance of a month's benefits for which the required work hours are not completed.

Also, while participants may be responsible for finding their own public service placement and for reporting and verifying their participation, the State agency must maintain records to support the issuance of benefits beyond the third month.

If a State intends to operate a comparable workfare program it must provide a detailed description of the program. State agencies will have the flexibility to determine how they will ensure compliance with Program time limits, but they must, at a minimum, provide a written description of their methodology that details compliance with this requirement. These submissions should be to the Regional office with copies forwarded to Headquarters.

If you have further questions or comments concerning workfare or comparable programs, contact Micheal Atwell, of the Program Design Branch, Program Development Division, at (703) 305-2449.

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Food Stamp Program