







## The Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is the foundation of the public food security effort. It provides grocery debit cards to households whose net incomes – after various deductions – are near or below the poverty line. In 2006–07 monthly participation averaged 1.1 million Pennsylvanians per month. The program is built on a concept called the Thrifty Food Plan, which assumes that each member of a 3–person household requires about \$4.68 a day for food in order to maintain a healthy and nutritious diet. The program further assumes that 30 percent of a household's net income is available to purchase food. Thus, it provides the difference between the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan and 30 percent of net household income. The value of the average benefit amount issued per person in Pennsylvania is \$91.24 per month (\$3.05 a day).

About 45 percent of Pennsylvania food stamp participants are children, and the program contributes significantly to their health. The frequency of iron deficiency, the most common nutritional deficiency in the United States, drops among families that participate, as do deficiencies of calcium, magnesium, Vitamin B12 and zinc. The program makes a significant economic impact in every Pennsylvania community; each dollar in food stamps results in \$1.84 in local economic activity. During the past year in Pennsylvania over \$1.2 billion in groceries were purchased with program funds. According to the USDA, \$1 billion in retail purchases generates an additional \$340 million in farm production and \$110 million in farm value-added sales.

 <p>Who can provide the service?</p>	<p>The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) is responsible for the Food Stamp Program. County assistance offices handle daily operations.</p>
 <p>How is it financed?</p>	<p>The program is funded by the federal government and administered by the PA Department of Public Welfare. The state pays half of the administrative costs.</p>
 <p>Who can receive this service?</p>	<p>Eligibility depends on the income of the household. Households (the elderly and disabled excepted) must have <u>gross</u> incomes below 130 percent of poverty. Program benefits are based on <u>net</u> income. A variety of deductions are allowed, including a standard deduction, 20 percent of earned income, child care costs, some shelter costs, the costs of paying child support, and – for the elderly or disabled – the costs of medical care that exceed \$35 a month. <b>A single parent with two children</b>, a 40 hour-per-week job paying \$8 an hour, child care costs of \$120 a month, shelter costs of \$500 a month (plus utilities and taxes) and a telephone would qualify for about \$302 a month. <b>A single adult age 60 or over</b> with \$650 in monthly income, unreimbursed medical costs of \$85 monthly, shelter costs of \$400 a month (plus utilities and taxes) and a telephone would qualify for about \$155 a month. Eligibility also depends on household resources. To be eligible, the household can not have countable resources exceeding \$2000 (\$3000 if disabled or elderly). One vehicle per household is excluded; also, vehicles used to make a living or to transport a disabled person are not counted. For most other vehicles the first \$4,650 in the fair market value is excluded.</p>
 <p>What is provided?</p>	<p>Each head-of-household receives a debit card, a private I.D. number, and an electronic account. The account is credited monthly with the benefit amount. The debit card can be used to pay for groceries at any store that accepts them.</p>
 <p>Contact</p>	<p>To apply, contact your local county assistance office. For free food stamp screening, call Hunger Action at 1-800-634-2033. To apply online, go to <a href="http://www.compass.state.pa.us">www.compass.state.pa.us</a>.</p>
 <p>Suggestions for advocacy</p>	<p>County offices have the authority to waive the face-to-face interview if a visit to the county assistance office would be a hardship due to a job, ill-health, a lack of public transportation, a child under six or the need to care for another family member. If you have such a hardship, request a telephone interview.</p>