

Recommendation 5: Encourage States to Integrate Food Distribution with Nutrition Education.

Within Food Stamp Nutrition Education, state and private expenditures for food distributed to low-income households in food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters should qualify as “match” if the food is distributed to heads of household who are participating in direct nutrition education activity. The cost of this change would be \$10 million annually to serve 100,000 households.

Rationale: During times of crisis, many high-risk households obtain a portion of their food from pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. These are community-based charities, often managed by local volunteers who have unique opportunities to address nutritional needs in the lives of their clients. The questions are practical and down-to-earth: How do I make my food budget stretch to next payday? How do I eat inexpensively yet stay away from food choices that increase my risk of hypertension, heart disease and diabetes?

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) offers funding through the Food Stamp Program (FSP) for nutrition education to FSP-eligible households. To qualify for funding, a state must commit an equal amount of state or local resources to nutrition education. Food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters generally lack funds that can be so committed. But they do have food inventories that are a valuable source of nutrition and that can play an integral role in nutrition education.

Needed is an administrative mechanism that would permit pantries, kitchens and shelters to combine these food inventories with nutrition education and thereby meet FNS match requirements. This would enable more of these facilities to offer nutrition education and more low-income consumers to receive relevant nutritional know-how from trusted members of their own communities.

Description: Except for food involved in a taste-testing, under current fiscal policy within Food Stamp Nutrition Education, the value of food distributed to needy households as part of a nutrition education experience can not be counted as “match”. This policy should change. The value of food distributed to a needy household should qualify as “match” when the food is an integral part of a nutrition education curriculum of fixed duration and the head of household is an active participant in activities related to that curriculum.

How it Would Work: A food pantry could offer a series of classes on how to stretch a food budget by preparing large quantities from basic ingredients. The classes, which would meet once or twice a month, would include cooking demonstrations, taste-testings and hands-on prep. At the end of each class, participants would receive a food package that included the basic ingredients needed to replicate the lesson in their own homes. The value of the food in the box would qualify as “match”, thereby qualifying the pantry for an equal amount of federal dollars to be used to provide the nutrition lessons.