



BACKGROUNDER

July 2007

The Texas Food Stamp Program

- The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is 100% federally funded.
- In Texas, 2.3 million people receive Food Stamps.
- The average monthly benefit is \$93 per person, which works out to just \$1 per meal.

Importance of Food Stamps for Low-income Families

- According to the federal government, Texas has one of the highest rates of hunger in the country (5.6% of households), and the highest percentage of “food insecure” households (16.4% of households)—families at risk for hunger due to limited resources.
- Food Stamps prevent hunger and help low-income working families meet their basic needs.
- Preventing hunger is in Texas’ long-term interest. Children who are malnourished cannot learn, which increases health care and special education costs for the state and reduces overall productivity.
- Food Stamps provide an important cushion during periods of employment or underemployment.
- Food Stamps help families making the transition from welfare to the workforce.

Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program

Low-income families with limited resources are eligible for Food Stamps. In addition, applicants must show proof of Texas residency, citizenship or immigration status,¹ social security number (SSN), and register for employment services if required (see below). To be eligible for Food Stamps, a family’s gross income must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty level. The following chart shows the maximum monthly income a family can have and still be eligible for benefits.

Household Size	Gross Monthly Income Limit	Net Monthly Income
1	\$ 1,062	\$ 817
2	\$ 1,430	\$ 1,100
3	\$ 1,799	\$ 1,384
4	\$ 2,167	\$ 1,667
Each Additional Member	+ 369	+ 284

*Households with elderly members (age 60+) do not have to meet the gross income test. Valid through September 30, 2007.

¹ Most legal immigrants are eligible for food stamps after living in the country for five years. Legal immigrant children are **immediately** eligible without a five-year residency requirement. Undocumented immigrants are **not** eligible for Food Stamps. Families that include undocumented or ineligible legal immigrants may still apply for benefits for eligible household members.

Resource Limits

Eligibility for Food Stamps is also based on a family's assets or resources. A family is not allowed to have more than \$5,000 in liquid resources, including the fair market value in excess of \$15,000 of one car, and the FMV in excess of \$4,650 of additional cars. Many assets are excluded when determining whether a family's resources are low enough to qualify for benefits.²

Employment Services & Work requirements

Applicants ages 16-59 who are not employed are required to register for Food Stamp Employment & Training services. Applicants exempt from this requirement include persons who are:

- a regular participant or outpatient in a drug addiction or alcoholic treatment program,
- responsible for the care of a dependent child under age 6 or a person with a disability,
- physically or mentally unfit for employment,
- a student enrolled in school, including an institution of higher education, or a person participating in a training program. (**Note:** some students must meet special student eligibility criteria),
- already registered for or exempt from employment services under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program,
- receiving unemployment compensation benefits or has applied for benefits,
- three to nine months pregnant, or
- employed or self-employed.

Time Limits for Childless Adults

While there are **no** Food Stamp time limits for families with children, there *are time limits on childless adults*, known as "ABAWDS," or able-bodied adults without dependents. Childless adults ages 18-50 who are not working at least 20 hours per week or participating in a work program are limited to three months of eligibility in a 36-month period, unless they are exempt from the time limit for one of the following reasons:

- exempt from employment services requirements,
- physically or mentally unfit to work 20 hours per week,
- member of a food stamp household that includes a child living in the home,
- pregnant,
- lives in a county with an unemployment rate over 10 percent, or
- lives in an ABAWD exemption county.

How to Apply

Most persons must apply for Food Stamps through their local HHSC office. For more information or to locate the nearest HHSC office, call HHSC at 1-888-834-7406 (toll-free). For people with hearing or speech impairments, call the TDD number at 1-888-425-6889 (toll-free). Persons **who live in Travis or Hays County** may apply by calling 2-1-1 or online at www.yourtexasbenefits.com.

²Resources that are excluded include the value of the family's home and surrounding property; income producing property; certain vehicles; and personal effects (such as clothes, jewelry, furnishings, and household goods).