

DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER NO. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE 13-2002

(Food Stamps)

TO: County Directors of Social Services

ATTENTION: Food Stamp Supervisors

SUBJECT: Changes in Food Stamp Policy

DATE: October 31, 2002

The purpose of this letter is to provide policy changes and clarifications based on recent interpretations received from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Changes concern the recertification process and certification periods for food stamp households.

I. ACCEPTING LATE QUARTERLY RECERTIFICATION FORMS

USDA informed states that it is acceptable to process a recertification instead of a reapplication in the month following the month that a certification period ends.

A. Accept a complete DSS-2435-QR in the month following the month the certification period ends. It is no longer necessary to complete a reapplication.

1. The DSS-2435-QR is not complete until all necessary verifications are returned.

2. Key a TC 6 and use the date the DSS-2435 QR is received in the agency as the date of application. Remove the 'N' in Field 40, No Proration, on the DSS-8590.

3. If the DSS-2435-QR is incomplete when received, send a DSS-8650, Notice of Information Needed, to request required verifications. If verifications are not received by the last workday of the reapplication month, deny the reapplication.

B. Proration of benefits and screening for emergency benefits applies to these cases.

1. Unless good cause exists, prorate benefits when DSS-2435-QR is received in the month following the end of the certification period. Refer to Section 515.06 of the Food Stamp Certification Manual to determine good cause.

2. Screen for expedited services when a DSS-2435 QR is received in the month following the end of the certification period.

C. Do not shift the base period when processing these recertifications.

EXAMPLE: A DSS-2435-QR due in October is received in the agency on November 7 with September pay stubs attached. Use the September income to process the recertification.

D. Thorough computer checks are an integral part of food stamp payment accuracy. Complete all computer matches for **all** recertifications, including quarterly recertifications.

II. SHORTENING CERTIFICATION PERIODS

Policy published in Food Stamp Certification Manual Change Notice 11-2002 effective November 1, 2002, no longer allows shortening of certification periods. It is **not** acceptable to use a Notice of Expiration or a Notice of Adverse Action to shorten a "cert thru" date. The new process requires issuance of a DSS-8650, Notice of Information Needed, when a household reports information that may affect benefits. There are new steps to take when a household reports a change.

A. If the household reports a change and provides the necessary information, process the change but do not change the existing certification period. Do not switch a household to Quarterly Recertification during an existing certification period. Changing a household to a Quarterly Recertification is allowed only at the beginning of a certification period.

EXAMPLE: A household is certified for 12 months based on stable Social Security income. A household member reports new employment in the second month of the certification period. Issue a DSS-8650, Notice of Information Needed, to request wage information to process the change. The household provides the wage information requested. Issue a DSS-8553, Notice of Adverse Action, and process the change. Continue the existing certification period as is and stress the change reporting requirements.

B. If the household fails to provide the necessary information, issue a Notice of Adverse Action and close the case.

NOTE: It is important that households receive a thorough explanation of the change reporting requirements. This is critical to ensure North Carolina's continued improvement in payment accuracy.

III. USING THE DSS-2435-QR FORM FOR MAIL-IN RECERTIFICATIONS

New Food Stamp regulations allow mail-in and telephone recertifications. Unless waived, a face-to-face interview must be conducted once in a 12-month period. It is acceptable to use the DSS-2435-QR or any other simplified recertification form as a telephone or mail-in recertification form. Keep in mind that telephone and mail-in recertifications are "full" recertifications subject to recertification procedures, i.e., completing computer matches. Please have your Program Integrity Representative review any locally developed

recertification form prior to its use to ensure that all federal requirements for content are met.

IV. MPLEMENTATION

Apply the above policy and procedures to all food stamp applications, recertifications, and changes in situation on or after November 1, 2002. This information will be added to the Food Stamp Certification Manual as soon as possible.

If you have any questions, please contact your Program Integrity Representative.

Sincerely,

Wilbert R. Morris, Chief

Economic Independence Section

WRM/rrm