
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES MANUAL
GENERAL PROCEDURES & REQUIREMENTS
FNS 115 ADMINISTRATION OF THE FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES PROGRAM

FNS 115 Administration of the Food and Nutrition Services Program

Change #1-2021

May 1, 2021

115.01 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)

Within USDA, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is responsible for the federal administration of the program and, in this capacity, consults and provides policy and guidance to the State Division of Social Services. FNS maintains eight regional offices throughout the United States. The Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia provides technical assistance and oversight of the North Carolina FNS Program. FNS also maintains a Field Office in Raleigh. The primary role of the Field Office is to authorize, and monitor program compliance of retailers authorized to accept FNS benefits. Additional duties of the Field Office staff include:

- A. Conducting reviews of county departments of social services on such topics as client services or employment training. These reviews are coordinated through the State Division of Social Services.
- B. Conducting inquiries into all civil rights complaints. While conducting these inquiries, FNS staff must be given direct and unrestricted access to FNS case files and staff. The purpose of the inquiry is to determine the facts surrounding the complaint. FNS Field Office staff forwards a report to the Atlanta Regional Office for review and evaluation. The findings of the inquiry, including any recommended corrective action, are directed to the State Office. The State is responsible for working with the county office to correct any problems identified.
- C. Other inquiries. Field Office staff may contact the county departments of social services (DSS) to follow up on such matters as recipient inquiries, complaints, or reports of alleged program violations.

115.02 NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (DHHS), DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)

The DHHS, DSS provides general State policies and procedures. The Division also provides supervision of the administration of the program through county departments of social services, including the conduct of performance reporting reviews.

115.03 COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

- A. The county directors of DSS are responsible for the certification of applicant households.
- B. The county DSS must provide the most current application from the DHHS Online Publications forms website for participation in the FNS Program to any person upon request and must accept an identifiable North Carolina state application when submitted.

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1. An identifiable application is an application containing a legible name and address that has been signed.
2. The person making the application is responsible for cooperating with the county DSS in providing the information necessary for the county DSS to make a determination of eligibility.
3. The county DSS must accept an identifiable application when submitted even if an appointment for an interview is assigned at a future date.
4. The practice of accepting applications only at the interview is not in accordance with federal regulations.
5. Counties must continue their efforts to assure timely and correct certifications by increasing certification staff and providing adequate certification facilities.

C. County DSS have direct responsibility for:

1. Determining the eligibility of applicants for the program;
2. Periodically reviewing such eligibility determinations;
3. Authorizing FNS benefits to those certified as eligible; and
4. Providing every applicant and participating household an opportunity for a fair hearing in accordance with the instructions contained herein.

D. County DSS are required to:

1. Have the most current version of the DSS-8207, Application for FNS, readily accessible to individuals and groups involved with outreach effort. (Outreach groups include, but are not limited to, senior citizen facilities, community action groups, and the Social Security Administration.);
2. Provide the most current versions of written information (such as pamphlets, brochures, etc.) to persons who request information about the FNS Program but choose not to apply;
3. Make available the most current version of the DSS-8625, Food and Nutrition Services Program Facts Pamphlet; **and**
4. Display the most current version of the required posters in waiting areas and other areas where the public is served. Required posters include, but are not limited to, the Nutrition Poster, the Non-Discrimination Poster, and the Complaint Poster. To check for the latest version and order posters contact:

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Social Services
Carlotta Dixon MHS, CPM
Program Compliance Section Chief
SERT ESF 6 Lead
Title VI-Civil Rights Coordinator

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820 S Boylan Ave
MSC 2401
Raleigh NC 27603
Courier #56-20-25
Tel:919-527-6421

5. County departments of social services must explain client rights and responsibilities to all applicants.
 - a. Explain that a client has a right to:
 - Receive an application on the same day it is requested in person at the county department of social services and for the application to be accepted by the county department of social services;
 - Select an authorized representative;
 - Non-discrimination;
 - A fair hearing; and
 - Receive deductions for legally obligated child support, childcare expenses, medical expenses, shelter expenses, utility expenses, and operational expenses for self-employment.
 - b. Explain the following client responsibilities.
 - Change reporting requirements;
 - Work Registration requirements;
 - Able Bodied Adults Without Dependent (ABAWD) requirements;
 - Enumeration requirements.
 - c. Explain the following penalties to all applicants and recipients.
 - Intentional Program Violation;
 - If anyone is convicted by a court of giving false information regarding residence in order to receive Work First Family Assistance (WFFA), FNS benefits, Medicaid, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in more than one place, that person will be ineligible to receive both cash assistance and FNS benefits for ten years from the date of conviction;
 - If a member of a FNS unit is convicted of buying guns, explosives, or ammunition with FNS benefits or selling FNS benefits of \$500 or more, the individual will not receive FNS benefits for the remainder of his life;

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- If the applicant gives false information about identity in order to receive FNS benefits and/or WFFA in more than one place, the applicant will not receive FNS benefits and/or WFFA for ten years; and
 - Substance abuse convictions.
- d. Explain to the applicant that the applicant's signature on the application workbook indicates the applicant:
- Answered truthfully to the best of his knowledge;
 - Understands that providing willfully incorrect or false information could cause the applicant to be charged with fraud;
 - Understands that authorization to contact any other person, agency, or organization to determine eligibility for assistance is given to the county department of social services;
 - Understands his rights and responsibilities;
 - States that all members of the FNS unit are either U.S. citizens or allowed to live in the U. S. by law;
 - Understands that information provided may be released to law enforcement officers (including probation/parole officers); and
 - Acknowledges that he has received an explanation of their right to an income deduction for the following items: legally obligated child support, child care expenses, medical expenses, utility expenses, and operational expenses for self-employment and understands that failure to report or verify any of the income deductions is viewed as a statement that the FNS unit does not want to receive a deduction for the unreported.
- e. Explain the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system. Explanation for the following must be given.
- The method of issuing FNS benefits;
 - The time period for expedited service;
 - How to use FNS benefits; and
 - Procedures to follow if benefits are not received.

115.04 NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

- A. Neither the State nor counties can discriminate against any applicant or participant for reasons of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, or political beliefs in any aspect of program administration including, but not limited to:

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1. Certification of the household;
 2. Issuance of benefits;
 3. Conduct of fair hearings; or
 4. Conduct of any other program service.
- B. It is the policy of Department of Health and Human Services to provide services, care, benefits, and assistance to all qualified persons without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, or political beliefs. You can get information about regulations against discrimination and how to file a complaint by writing the:

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Social Services
Carlotta Dixon, MHS, CPM
Program Compliance Section Chief
Equal Employment Opportunity Title VI Civil Rights Coordinator
2401 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-2401
Refer to Section 120, Complaints and Fair Hearings

C. County Responsibilities

1. Each county has the responsibility to:
 - a. Publicize the procedures described in Section 120.02, Fair Hearings, and 120.03, Discrimination Complaints.
 - b. Display the DSS-8240 and the DSS-8240sp, Food and Nutrition Services Complaint Procedures form.
 - c. Ensure that all offices involved in administering the program and serving the public display the nondiscrimination poster provided by USDA/FNS.
 - d. Ensure that participants and other low-income households have access to information regarding nondiscrimination statutes and policies, complaint procedures, and the rights of participants within ten days of the date of a request.
 - e. Ensure that applicants and recipients are advised of their rights under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
 - f. When an individual alleges discrimination verbally, complete the NCDHHS Complaint Form and mail to the address in Section 115.04 B. within five calendar days of receipt of complaint.
 - g. Mail written complaints of discrimination to the address in Section 115.04 B. within five calendar days of receipt.

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- h. Include these requirements as part of orientation and training for new staff and review with staff on an annual basis. Documentation of review efforts must be maintained, including the names of staff involved in the review session.
- i. County agencies must conduct annual Civil Rights training and maintain attendance records of the training. County agencies are required to make the attendance records available to the Management Evaluation reviewer as part of the regularly scheduled Management Evaluation Review.
- j. County agencies are required to make case files or other pertinent information necessary to complete reviews available to state staff upon request.

115.05 ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER (EBT)

Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) is an electronic system that allows FNS recipients to access their benefits to make food purchases with a plastic card at U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), FNS authorized retailers. EBT is the method used in the State of North Carolina to issue FNS benefits.

- A. Once eligibility and level of benefits have been determined, an account is established at a financial institution in the recipient's name, and FNS benefits are deposited electronically into the account each month. A plastic card, similar to a bank card, is mailed by the financial institution to the recipient. The EBT card carrier instructs clients to contact EBT Customer Service to complete the telephone PIN selection process. The telephone accessible Automated Response Unit (ARU) gives clients the capability to PIN their EBT. A personal identification number (PIN) is chosen by the recipient which activates the card and allows access to the account when making purchases at an authorized retailer. Recipients are offered the opportunity to change the PIN number at any time by calling EBT Customer Service and accessing the Automated Response Unit (ARU). The contact number for EBT Customer Service is 1-888-622-7328.
- B. Explain to each new FNS household that card PINning instructions will be mailed along with the EBT card. FNSU's can contact EBT Customer Service and access the ARU 24 hours a day, seven days a week. EBT cards are mailed along with instructions explaining the card PINning procedure. Inform the FNSU to follow the instructions on the card carrier to PIN their EBT card by telephone. Benefits are accessible to the FNSU once the EBT card is PINned.
- C. Offer assistance to households who have difficulty understanding the telephone PIN selection process. Assist these households by advising the household of its right to an authorized representative and, if necessary, by assisting in finding an authorized representative who can act in their behalf or by using other appropriate means. Refer to Section 220, Authorized Representatives.
- D. When paying for groceries, the FNS recipient can swipe the EBT card at a Point of Sale (POS) terminal or sign a manual form. When the card is swiped at the POS, the recipient enters the secret PIN number to access the FNS account. The processor electronically verifies the PIN and the account balance and sends an authorization or denial back to the retailer. If the transaction is authorized, the recipient's account is debited for the

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amount of the purchase. No money and no FNS coupons change hands. Payment is made to the retailer through a settlement process at the end of the business day. Although no PIN is used with the manual form, the process for the store to get authorized transaction approval is the same.

- E. EBT benefits are available 24 hours a day, seven days per week (including weekends and holidays) for FNS units that do not reside in Alcohol and Drug Treatment Centers (ADTC's). FNS benefits are issued on a monthly basis. Each month, in which a FNSU is eligible for an allotment, benefits are placed into their account. The benefit availability date is determined by the last digit of the head of household's social security number as indicated below. Benefits are available to the FNSU at 6:00 a.m. on their issuance date
- F. Benefits for a FNS unit that resides in an ADTC are disbursed three times during each month the FNS unit remains eligible. The dates of disbursements are the 5th, 15th, and 25th calendar day of each month. Refer to Section 220, Authorized Representatives.

If the last Digit is:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Benefits are available on:	3rd	5th	7th	9th	11th	13th	15th	17th	19th	21st

NOTE: The benefits availability date shown above is the actual calendar date.

EXCEPTION: The benefit availability date for non-citizens without a SSN is the third calendar day of the month. If the head of household's SSN is unknown and is all zeroes in NC FAST, the benefit availability day will be the third calendar date of the month.