

# FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

**Goal: Increase by 38% the number of eligible, low-income households in New York State participating in the Food Stamp Program.**

- from **900,000** households to **1.25 million** households
- from **50%** of eligible households to **68%**

## Strategies to remove barriers to enrollment by eligible households

- **Provide annual incentive awards to local social services districts** that achieve the largest increases in Food Stamp Program participation. [Requires legislation and subsequent funding.]
  - **Increase funds for Food Stamp Program administration.** Increase funds to the State and the localities. This is essential to fund technology improvements and adequate staffing. [Requires funding and federal and state legislation.]
  - **Distribute Food Stamp outreach materials** through other services and providers that reach low-income populations, such as the food banks' network of pantries, hospital discharge planning procedures, and the mailing of checks and other materials to recipients of Unemployment Insurance, Social Security, and Disability benefits. [Requires resources and administrative cooperation.]
  - **Eliminate or minimize work requirements** to align the program more closely with other federal benefit programs, to improve access for low-income families (including the newly unemployed and part-time workers), and to clarify that the Food Stamp Program is a nutrition assistance program. [Requires state administrative action or federal legislation.]
  - **Rename the Food Stamp Program**, thereby removing the obsolete reference to coupons, reducing stigma and providing opportunity for new outreach. [Requires state administrative action or federal legislation.]
  - **Improve the State's Food Stamp telephone hotline.** Provide more time to speak and/or type, make identification simpler than 19-digit card number, include languages other than English and Spanish. [Requires state administrative action.]
  - **Expand the state Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP)** to have this service in every county. [Requires funding.]
  - **Change to direct State administration** of the Food Stamp Program, thereby removing a layer of bureaucracy, assuring more uniform operation, and further distinguishing the program from welfare. [Requires state legislation.]
- OR
- **Allow households to apply at any Food Stamp office** within the state. Households could apply at any office throughout the State instead of only in their home county. [Requires state regulatory action.]

## **FOOD STAMP PROGRAM** (continued)

### **Strategies to facilitate ongoing receipt of Food Stamp benefits by eligible households**

- **Assure provision of 5 months of transitional food stamps (TBA)** to all households leaving TANF. Current practice results in termination of FS benefits for far too many households that leave TANF. [Requires state administrative action.]
- **Extend transitional food stamps (TBA) from 5 months to 6 months** to better conform to other federal benefit programs. [Requires federal legislation.]
- **Eliminate the interview requirement for recertifying households.** Allow households to reapply by mail; this would conform with Medicaid rules. [Requires federal regulatory action and/or federal waiver request.]
- **Permit recertification services by Nutrition Outreach and Education Programs (NOEPs).** Allow use of federal Food Stamp outreach funds to assist households through the recertification process. [May require change in federal guidance.]

### **Strategies to extend benefits to more low-income households**

- **Establish a State Food Stamp Supplemental Benefit** for all Food Stamp households. [Requires state legislative and budget action.]
- **Provide food stamps to all otherwise eligible legal immigrants.** The federal government should restore federal Food Stamp eligibility to all legal immigrants. Until such legislation is adopted, the state should reauthorize the State Food Assistance Program (FAP), now scheduled to expire in September 2005, and should expand the program from the current county option limited to serving elderly people and domestic violence victims to a consistent statewide program serving all legal immigrants not eligible for federal benefits. [Requires federal/state legislative and budget action.]
- **Remove the asset test for households below 130%** of the federal poverty level by extending categorical eligibility to this population. The current asset limit is \$3,000 for elderly or disabled, and \$2,000 for all others. [Requires state regulatory action and retention of federal waiver option or federal legislation.]
- **Raise asset cap level to \$10,000.** [Requires federal legislation.]
- **Calculate benefit allotments using USDA's Moderate or Low-Cost Food Plan,** instead of the Thrifty Food Plan. [Requires federal legislation.]

# **FOOD STAMPS FOR OLDER ADULTS**

**Goal: Increase by one-half the number of eligible households with low-income older adults participating in the Food Stamp Program in New York State.**

- from **210,000** households to **315,000**
- from **35%** of eligible individuals to **52%**

## **Strategies to remove barriers to enrollment by eligible older adults**

- **Extend the New York State Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP)**, under which SSI beneficiaries are automatically enrolled in the Food Stamp Program by using applications for other means-tested programs serving older adults (e.g., the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Program (EPIC), senior housing, senior meal sites receiving Child and Adult Care Food Program funds, heating assistance (HEAP), Medicaid as the basis for enrollment for Food Stamps. [Requires state regulatory action and federal waiver.]
- **Implement a Food Stamp application referral process.** Create a check-off box on the application forms for other public benefits commonly used by low-income older adults, such as those enumerated above, to authorize a referral to a NOEP or other organization that can provide more information about Food Stamps and assist with an application. [Requires state and federal regulatory actions.]
- **Provide annual incentive awards to localities** that achieve the largest increases in older adult Food Stamp Program participation. [Requires funding.]
- **Provide Food Stamp Prescreening Manual and Food Stamp training to every registered dietician** in local offices for the aging (LOFA) and to every Meals on Wheels program not associated with a LOFA. [Requires funding.]
- **Provide Food Stamp information to each person who receives food coupons under the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)**, which serves older adults declaring income of less than 185% of poverty. [Requires state administrative action.]
- **Develop Food Stamp outreach TV commercials aimed at older adults.** [Requires funding.]
- **Increase NOEP funding** so that projects in every county can target the objective of increasing Food Stamp participation among older adults. [Requires funding.]

## **FOOD STAMPS FOR OLDER ADULTS** (continued)

### **Strategies to facilitate the ongoing receipt of Food Stamp benefits by eligible households with older adults**

- **Extend from two to four years the recertification period** for older adults without earned income. [Requires federal legislation.]
- **Re-open and conduct outreach for closed NYS Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP) cases** every 12 months. SSI recipients who did not use their benefit within 90 days and therefore had their NYSNIP case closed will have another opportunity to participate. [Requires state administrative action and federal waiver.]

### **Strategies to enhance Food Stamp Benefits for older adults**

- **Permit older adults to purchase prepared food with Food Stamps.** This would especially help those living alone or in housing with limited cooking facilities. [Requires state administrative action.]
- **Increase the minimum monthly benefit from \$10 to \$25.** This could be accomplished by legislation at the federal level or, in the absence of federal action, by state legislation creating a State Food Stamp supplement. [Requires federal / state legislative and budget action.]
- **Provide a standard medical deduction,** similar to the standard utility allowance, for use in calculating Food Stamp benefits, with persons whose medical bills exceed the standard deduction allowed to use their actual costs. [Requires federal legislation or waiver.]
- **Reduce from \$35 to \$10 the amount of medical expenses required** to be incurred before one can claim a deduction for the purpose of calculating Food Stamp benefits. [Requires federal statutory action.]

### **Strategies to extend benefits to more older adults with low incomes**

- **Eliminate the asset test** for older adults. [Requires federal statutory action.]
- **Provide a minimum Food Stamp benefit** for older adults with incomes up to 185% of poverty. Eligibility for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, reduced-price meals for schoolchildren and senior meal sites, and WIC is set at or below 185% of poverty. [Requires federal legislative and budget action or pilot project authorization and funding.]

## **SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM**

**Goal: Double the number of low-income children participating in the School Breakfast Program in New York State.**

- from **300,000** students to **600,000**
- from **23%** of low-income students served to **46%**

**Strategies to make the School Breakfast Program more accessible**

- **Require the approval of a majority of the voters** before a school district can decline to operate a School Breakfast Program. [Requires state legislation.]
- **Require schools to allocate a minimum of 20 minutes to the breakfast program.** [Requires state legislation.]
- **Provide classroom breakfast start-up grants.** [Requires funding.]

**Strategies to facilitate School Breakfast Program enrollment**

- **Provide for direct communication between OTDA and the school districts** to certify students for free school meals. Students are automatically eligible for free school meals if the household receives Food Stamps or public assistance. Current direct certification practice calls for OTDA to mail to each PA/FS household a letter certifying their eligibility for free school meals, and the household must then submit this letter to the school. Improving the certification process would facilitate school meal participation and reduce administrative costs by eliminating mailings. [Requires state administrative action.]
- **Increase NOEP funding** so that projects in every county can provide outreach and information about the School Breakfast Program to families with children. [Requires funding.]

**Strategies to extend benefits to more low-income children**

- **Eliminate the reduced-price category for school meals.** Make all students from households with incomes below 185% of poverty eligible for free meals. [Requires federal action.]
- **Create universal breakfast programs at all schools with 50% of students eligible** for free or reduced-price school meals. [Requires funding and state legislation.]

# **SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM**

**Goal: Increase by one-third the number of low-income children participating in the Summer Food Service Program in New York State.**

- from **260,000** children to **346,000** children
- from **20%** of eligible children to **27%**

## **Strategies to increase the number of Summer Food Service Program sites**

- **Require school districts to operate Summer Food Service Programs.** Make the Summer Food Service Program available at or near every eligible elementary school if any elementary school within the district meets the open-site eligibility criteria (unless another organization sponsors a site at or near the qualifying elementary school). [Requires state legislation.]
- **Provide start-up costs** to support Summer Food Program sponsorship and site development. [Requires funding.]
- **Simplify the reimbursement process** for costs associated with the program, by adding New York State to the federal Lugar Pilots so that sponsors may use a “meals x rate” reimbursement process. [Requires federal legislation.]
- **Increase Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) funding** so that projects in every county can provide technical assistance and support to encourage local agencies to become sponsors or sites. [Requires funding.]

## **Strategies to remove barriers to Summer Food Service Program participation**

- **Provide funding for transporting** children and, where necessary, meals, to Summer Food Program sites. [Requires funding.]
- **Increase NOEP funding** so that projects in every county can work to increase Summer Food Service Program participation in high-need areas, by informing low-income families with children about the existence of Summer Food Service Program sites in their neighborhoods. [Requires funding.]

## **Strategies to extend benefits to more low-income children**

- **Expand the criteria for "open sites,"** where all children receive meals at no charge regardless of income, from the current requirement of at least 50% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to 40%. [Requires federal legislation, or funding for a demonstration program.]