



CalFresh: General Information

What is CalFresh?

CalFresh is the California name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which provides eligible households with a monthly allotment of funds to ensure access to healthy foods. Many community members who would be eligible for benefits are not yet accessing CalFresh. The number of participating households has greatly increased and work is being done to reach additional potential customers.

Who can receive CalFresh?

To be eligible the household must:

- Reside in the county of application
- Have one household member who is a US citizen or documented non-citizen
- Meet income limits (see below)

CalFresh Households:

CalFresh eligibility determination is dependent on who is in the CalFresh household, which determines whose income to count and the amount of benefits. There is no age-requirement to get benefits. A customer will be asked who they live with and who they “purchase and prepare” food with. Who must be together in a CalFresh household?

- Relatives: parents living with their children under age 22 and spouses.
- People living together who buy food and make meals together.

Income:

Households with gross income less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level may be eligible. Many households with members who are age 60 and older or permanently disabled are not subject to gross income limits but will have to meet net income requirements after allowable deductions. Customers will be asked about all income including earned income from wages or self-employment and any unearned income (unemployment insurance benefits, child support).

Deductions:

Customers will be asked about their rent or mortgage expenses, utility expenses, and other limited deductions in order to increase the household allotment. Court ordered child support payments can also be used as a deduction. Households with members who are age 60 and older or permanently disabled can use many medical expenses as a deduction and should talk to an eligibility worker about qualifying deductions.

Property:

Currently most CalFresh households do not have to meet an asset test. The customer is asked about property but is not required to provide any verifications except in special circumstances.

The Process

Customers can apply in person, online at BenefitsCal.com, by phone, through the mail or by fax. Interviews are generally a half hour to an hour. Customers are contacted in person or by phone (if possible) to schedule an interview. Some interviews are completed at the time of

application. The customer is sent an appointment letter for a face-to-face or phone interview and can change the appointment time or method by calling 877-410-8809.

Benefits/EBT card

The head of household is issued an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card that works like a debit card and can be used at most grocery stores and farmers' markets. A customer can designate another person to be an additional or alternate cardholder. The EBT card can be used to purchase groceries and seeds and seedlings for edible plants to grow at home. Benefits cannot be used for cleaning products or any other taxable product, and may not be used for prepared hot foods.

Expedite (Emergency)

Reporting income, liquid resources and expenses on application forms enable Social Services to review for eligibility to expedited services (ES). Those meeting ES criteria are interviewed and approved (if eligible) within 3 working days.

Maintaining Benefits (Retention)

Once a customer is receiving benefits the goal is for the benefits to continue without interruption. All households must complete Semi-Annual Reports (SAR). To increase retention and reduce "churn" (customers losing benefits then reapplying within a short period of time) customers can opt in to text reminder notifications and sign up for BenefitsCal.com to submit the reports online. Most households recertify benefits annually through an interview to maintain benefits. Special recertification rules apply to households living on Native American reservations or with elderly or disabled household members.

Other CalFresh Facts

- People receiving any type of Social Security income can apply for CalFresh.
- Customers are no longer asked about prior drug-related felonies as they do not affect eligibility.
- Many customers go through the application process without ever visiting a Social Services office.
- CalFresh boosts the economy by bringing in federal dollars that are spent locally.

Frequently Asked Questions

How is CalFresh different from WIC or food stamps?

The Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program helps income-eligible pregnant, breastfeeding and post-partum women and children under the age of five have greater access to nutritious foods. A family can receive CalFresh and WIC at the same time. WIC: 707-445-6255.

Food stamps is the old name for SNAP/CalFresh. The name changed in 2010 to reflect the focus on nutrition as well as the fact that there are no longer actual stamps.

CalFresh can be used at Farmers' Markets? Really?

CalFresh benefits can be used at over half the local farmers' markets, increasing access to locally grown foods. The Market Match program provides bonus "market match dollars" to CalFresh customers at farmers' markets to encourage healthy eating and local spending. For details go to foodforpeople.org/humboldt-market-match.

Where can I get more information?

Food for People at foodforpeople.org, navigate to CalFresh Task Force pages. Humboldt County Social Services, humboldtgov.org/CalFresh, 877-410-8809.