

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

The federal Food Stamp Program is the largest and most widely available hunger alleviation program for low-income people. It has contributed to the success of welfare reform by supporting the transition from welfare to work. Today, there are more working families than welfare families receiving food stamps. Food Stamp participation has declined, while serving an average of 17.4 million each month in 2001; approximately 11 million fewer clients than its peak in March 1994. The USDA reports that 44% of this decline is credited to a strong economy, success of welfare to work programs, and restrictions on legal immigrants and unemployed adults. More than half of the decline resulted in the reduction of eligible food stamp participants.

Fresno County Food Stamp Recipients (FFY 2001-02)

- 68,269 clients on average per month received public assistance food stamps.
- 25,267 clients on average per month received non-assistance food stamps; 63% of those clients were children and this population continues to grow with current monthly average of 26,306 as of September 2002.
- A total of 93,536 clients on average per month received food stamps. Based on Fresno County population of 799,407, 11.6% received food stamps.
- 53% increase in Fresno County non-assistance food stamp participation occurred between July 2001 through June 2002 in response to recent economic factors and outreach efforts.
- Average monthly food stamp allotment is \$237 per family.
- Fresno County issued over \$84 million in food stamps which is greater than 16 states and territories

Barriers to Food Stamp Participation

- Lengthy and complicated application
- Statewide Finger Imaging System (SFIS) designed to avoid duplicated benefits among counties
- Stigma and embarrassment of using paper coupons
- Inadequate benefits
- Property and auto rules
- Burdensome Paperwork: Monthly Reporting
- Welfare to Work Drop-off

Improved Accessibility to Food Stamps

- Fresno County supports legislation to simplify the application process and to align food stamp rules with TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) rules for program simplification
- Implementation of quarterly status reporting in August 2003 will alleviate burdensome paperwork
- Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) will eliminate the paper coupon system and replace it with a type of benefit card similar to a bank card in June 2003
- Increase in ABAWD waivers has allowed adults between the ages of 18 and 50 without dependents to receive food stamps for a limited period of time
- Food Stamp outreach has increased with mailings, brochures, advertising, community presentations, and participation in health fairs.
- Number of locations have increased throughout Fresno County where food stamp applications are accepted.
- Continued collaboration with food banks, advocacy groups and local community-based organizations to identify hunger needs and to provide food stamp participation outreach