

FACT SHEET

Food Assistance Benefits

What are Food Assistance benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps)?

The Food Assistance program is designed to raise nutritional levels, to expand buying power and to safeguard the health and well-being of individuals in low-income households in Ohio. A household may consist of an individual or a group of individuals who live together and usually purchase and prepare their food together.

Do I qualify for Food Assistance benefits?

You may qualify for benefits if your household's gross monthly income is at or under 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Some households may qualify if they have income over the limit if someone in the household is elderly or disabled. If your household's income is under the limit, or if the limit does not apply, we then review your household expenses to determine your monthly benefit amount. The expenses we review include such things as rent or mortgage costs, gas, electric, water, sewer, phone, medical expenses, and payments for child support and child care. In determining whether you qualify, we will also look at the number of people in your household who purchase and prepare food together. In special situations, resources such as cash, savings and stocks also are considered when determining whether a person is eligible.

How can I apply for Food Assistance?

You must apply for Food Assistance by filling out the Request for Cash, Food and Medical Assistance (JFS 7200) application form. You can get the application at your local county department of job and family services (CDJFS) or at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/ofam/pdf/7200.pdf> on the internet. The application must be submitted to your local CDJFS.

You can find the address and phone number of your local CDJFS at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/county/cntydir.stm> or by calling 1-866-635-3748. (Follow the instructions for Food Assistance.) You may be able to find your local CDJFS in the county government section of your phone book.

You may also file the application through your local Ohio Benefit Bank site. You can find the site nearest you and get more information at <http://governor.ohio.gov/obb>. The Ohio Benefit Bank helps low- and moderate-income Ohioans apply for work supports such as tax credits and public benefits, including Food Assistance.

Be sure you get the Your Rights (JFS 8000) brochure from the CDJFS or at <http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/file.asp?id=54428>. This brochure will give you information about how to apply for many other types of benefits, including Food Assistance.

What will I need to apply for Food Assistance?

Proof of:

- Social Security Number (SSN), or proof of applying for your SSN.
- Income (pay stubs, tax records, child support, etc.)
- Identity
- Child care/dependent care costs
- Child support paid for children not living with you
- Housing and utility costs
- Any medical expenses for those with disabilities or for those over age 60 (including prescriptions)

Your CDJFS may check the information that you provide by contacting other agencies or people to make certain the information provided is correct. The CDJFS may ask you to provide other documents. If you need help getting any documents, tell them and they will help you get the documents.

What can I buy with Food Assistance benefits?

You can use your Food Assistance benefits to buy most food or food products intended for human consumption. Items that may not be purchased with Food Assistance include:

- alcoholic beverages
- tobacco
- vitamins and/or medicines
- hot food products that are prepared to be eaten immediately
- non-food items (i.e. pet food, paper products, soaps, household supplies)

You are not allowed to sell or trade Food Assistance benefits, buy non-food items, or use Food Assistance benefits to buy food for someone who is not a member of your household.

How will I receive my Food Assistance benefits?

You will receive an Ohio Direction card, which is like a debit card. Your card will come with instructions for you to create a personal identification number (PIN). Your benefits will be added to your Ohio Direction account every month. You may use your card by swiping it and entering your PIN. The amount of your purchase is automatically deducted from your account.

Where can I use my Ohio Direction card?

You may use your Ohio Direction card at grocery stores and retailers that display the Ohio Direction sign. If you do not see the sign, check with the store manager or a cashier before doing your shopping.

What if I think my Civil Rights have been violated?

Your local CDJFS and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) are public agencies that manage federal money. Laws do not allow discrimination in managing programs that use federal money. Discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion or political beliefs is against the law.

To file a complaint of discrimination with the ODJFS Bureau of Civil Rights, write to ODJFS, Bureau of Civil Rights, 30 E. Broad St., 37th floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215. Or call (614) 644-2703 or toll free 1-866-227-6353. If you are hearing impaired call: 1-866-221-6700. You can also fax a complaint to (614) 752-6381.

To file a complaint of discrimination with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) write to USDA Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (Voice & TDD).