

Should I Apply for Food Stamps In These Tough Economic Times?

Times are tough. Many people are having their work hours cut or losing their jobs. It is hard to make ends meet. Food Stamps can help.

Is it worth the trouble to get Food Stamps? Yes.

Example: A family of 4 has a monthly household income of \$2,167. They could get up to \$518 a month in Food Stamps.

Applying for food stamps:

The Food Stamp program is completely funded by the federal government. The Department of Human Service office runs the Food stamp program.

The Food Stamp program is only open to U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, or legal immigrants. You must have a Social Security number or proof that you applied for one.

Eligibility for food stamps depends on household size and income. There is no age limit. Families with children age 21 or younger are one household. What counts as income? Wages, public assistance benefits, unemployment, worker's compensation, child support, pensions, social security, and more.

You also can't have more than \$2,000 in assets. Assets include cash, bank accounts, certificates of deposit. Your home and one car or truck doesn't count. Is someone in your household age 60 or older or disabled? Then you can have up to \$3,000 in assets.

Food Stamps are not really "stamps" anymore. Now you get a card called an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card. Your Food Stamp money goes directly in an account. You use the card like a credit card to pay for groceries at the store. You have to know the Personal ID number to use the card. Food Stamps can only be used for food. You have to pay for things like soap, lotion, pet food, diapers, or alcohol yourself.

Go to your local Department of Human Services office to apply for Food Stamps. Within 45 days you will be told if you can get Food Stamps. The 45 days start when they get your application. If your household is very needy, you can get Food Stamps quicker. You can get them within 7 days after you apply.

Turned down for Food Stamps but think you should have gotten them? You can appeal. When you appeal a different person will look at your application. Want a lawyer to help you? Call Legal Aid Society at 1-800-238-1443. It's a free call.

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Note: This column is not intended to take the place of legal advice. All cases are different and need individual attention. Talk to a private attorney of your choice to review the facts and law specific to your case.

The Legal Aid Society is a non-profit law firm, not a government agency, and all calls are strictly confidential. To receive information on other common legal problems, please visit our website at www.las.org or call **1-800-238-1443**. Legal Aid is funded in part by the Legal Services Corporation, contributions to an annual fundraising campaign, the Tennessee Bar Foundation, the Access to Justice Fund, and the United Way.