



# Food Stamps in Alaska: Increasing Purchasing Power for Low-Income Families

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*“ . . .[Many] people are missing out on one way to stretch their food dollars and buy better food. As food prices, energy bills, and housing expenses increase, Food Stamps can be a huge help.” – D.C. Hunger Solutions (2008)*

## Poverty in the United States

Poverty in the  
United States ..... 1

Poverty is a persistent problem in the United States with huge social and economic impacts. Last year, 37.3 million citizens struggled to meet their needs for food, clothing and shelter. Approximately 12.5 percent of households exist at or below federally recognized poverty thresholds. In Alaska, that individual threshold is \$13,000 annually. A family of four is considered to be living in poverty at \$26,508 per year.

What are Food Stamps? ..... 1

Despite this year’s increasingly harsh economic climate, a significant gap exists between those households that access food stamps and those who qualify but *choose not* to receive food stamp benefits. The Alaska economy loses \$49 million dollars annually due to the reduced purchasing power of the 49,351 citizens who are eligible but are not receiving food stamps.

Stigmas that Prevent  
Eligible Participants  
from Applying ..... 1

## What Are Food Stamps?

Impacts of the Farm Bill ..... 1

The food stamp program is the federal government’s most sophisticated effort to address the reality of American hunger and food insecurity. It is one of the most effective ways to stimulate the economy and has been in existence in some form for more than 60 years. Food stamps is an entitlement program; if you qualify, you are guaranteed assistance. This said, there is an application process and recipients must be willing to keep their information current in order to continue receiving the funds.

Food Stamp Outreach ..... 2

## Stigmas That Prevent Eligible Participants From Applying

Since the program began, there has been an association between food stamps and welfare, or the inability of the recipient to manage their financial affairs. Unlike scholarships, tax rebates or other economic stimuli, a stigma remains around food stamps. The stigma, plus perceptions that the benefits are low and the application process is arduous all contribute to the decision for some not to apply.

## Impacts of the Farm Bill

The US Congress recently approved the Farm Bill. This bill affects a wide-range of government agencies and programs. As the name suggests, much of the bill addresses farming and farm subsidies. But in doing so, the bill also impacts Food Stamps, and TEFAP and CSFP, which grant greater access to the food produced by American farms. The bill must be renewed or extended every five years. This

# Strengthening Alaska's Anti-Hunger Network

cycle, state agencies administering the food stamp program were given several new options and mandatory requirements. Effective October 1:

- Minimum benefits were increased from \$10 to \$14.
- Future assets limits will now be adjusted for inflation.
- Certain pre-tax savings plans, college plans and IRAs no longer count against the applicant.
- All childcare expenses are now deductible.
- Changes were made to simplify the eligibility process.
- Increases were made to income limits:

Monthly Income Limits (130% of the Federal Poverty Line)	
Household Size	Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,409
2	\$1,896
3	\$2,384
4	\$2,871

## Food Stamp Outreach

People who are receiving food stamp assistance may not access the emergency food program as often. It is to the benefit of anti-hunger organizations to outreach to clients, dispell stigmas about the food stamp program, and get the correct information out to those who need it most.

Food Bank of Alaska, with grant support from the United Way and USDA, works to bring food stamp information to agencies that are serving clients in need. The Food Stamp Outreach Program can pre-screen applicants for potential eligibility. The program coordinator can visit your agency and teach your volunteers about the food stamp program and/or conduct an outreach clinic at your site. For more information about the Food Stamp Outreach Program, call [\(907\) 272-3663](tel:907-272-3663).

If you are in a rural location or want to begin food stamp outreach through your own organization, download the Community Partner Outreach Toolkit from the USDA. You can access it at [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/tool-kits\\_partners.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/tool-kits_partners.htm). This toolkit has everything you'll need to know about food stamp outreach including facts about the program, frequently asked questions, tips on creating collaboration with other organizations, using the media and community resources, and much more.

You can stay informed about what is changing in the food stamp program on the state and national level through these websites:

- State of Alaska Department of Public Assistance ([www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/))
- USDA Food Nutrition Services ([www.fns.usda.gov/fns/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/))
- Food Research and Action Center ([www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org))

**Next Month:  
Building a  
Coalition**

