

THE FOOD STAMP ACT OF 1964

Public Law 88-525

88th Congress, H.R. 10222

August 31, 1964

An Act

To strengthen the agricultural economy; to help to achieve a fuller and more effective use of food abundances; to provide for improved levels of nutrition among low-income households through a cooperative Federal-State program of food assistance to be operated through normal channels of trade; and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as “The Food Stamp Act of 1964”.

DECLARATION OF POLICY

Sec. 2. It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, in order to promote the general welfare, that the Nation’s abundance of food should be utilized cooperatively by the States, the Federal Government, and local governmental units to the maximum extent practicable to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s population and raise levels of nutrition among low-income households. The Congress hereby finds that increased utilization of foods in establishing and maintaining adequate national levels of nutrition will tend to cause the distribution in a beneficial manner of our agricultural abundances and will strengthen our agricultural economy, as well as result in more orderly marketing and distribution of food. To effectuate the policy of Congress and the purposes of this Act, a food stamp program, which will permit those households with low incomes to receive a greater share of the Nation’s food abundance, is herein authorized.

DEFINITIONS

Sec. 3. As used in this Act—

- (a) The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture.
- (b) The term “food” means any food or food product for human consumption except alcoholic beverages, tobacco, those foods which are identified on the package as being imported, and meat and meat products which are imported.
- (c) The term “coupon” means any coupon, stamp, or type of certificate issued pursuant to the provisions of this act.
- (d) The term “coupon allotment” means the total value of coupons to be issued to a household during each month or other time period.
- (e) The term “household” shall mean a group of related or non-related individuals, who are not residents of an institution or boarding house, but are living as one economic unit sharing common cooking facilities and for whom food is customarily purchased in common. The term “household” shall also mean a single individual living alone who has cooking facilities and who purchases and prepares food for home consumption.

(f) The term “retail food store” means an establishment, including a recognized department thereof, or a house-to-house trade route which sells food to households for home consumption.

(g) The term “wholesale food concern” means an establishment which sells food to retail food stores for resale to households.

(h) The term “State agency” means the agency of the State government which has responsibility for the administration of the federally aided public assistance programs.

(i) The term “bank” means member or nonmember banks of the Federal Reserve System.

(j) The term “State” means the fifty States and the District of Columbia.

(k) The term “food stamp program” means any program promulgated pursuant to the provisions of this Act.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Sec. 4. (a) The Secretary is authorized to formulate and administer a food stamp program under which, at the request of an appropriate State agency, eligible households within the State shall be provided with an opportunity more nearly to obtain a nutritionally adequate diet through the issuance to them of a coupon allotment which shall have a greater monetary value than their normal expenditures for food. The coupons so received by such households shall be used only to purchase food from retail food stores which have been approved for participation in the food stamp program. Coupons issued and used as provided in this Act shall be redeemable at face value by the Secretary through the facilities of the Treasury of the United States.

(b) In areas where a food stamp program is in effect, there shall be no distribution of federally owned foods to households under the authority of any other law except during emergency situations caused by a national or other disaster as determined by the Secretary.

(c) The Secretary shall issue such regulations, not inconsistent with this Act, as he deems necessary or appropriate for the effective and efficient administration of the food stamp program.

ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS

Sec. 5. (a) Participation in the food stamp program shall be limited to those households whose income is determined to be a substantial limiting factor in the attainment of a nutritionally adequate diet.

(b) In complying with the limitation on participation set forth in subsection (a) above, each State agency shall establish standards to determine the eligibility of applicant households. Such standards shall include maximum income limitations consistent with the income standards used by the State agency in administration of its federally aided public assistance programs. Such standards also shall place a limitation on the resources to be allowed eligible households. The standards of eligibility to be used by each State for the food stamp program shall be subject to the approval of the Secretary.

ISSUANCE AND USE OF COUPONS

Sec. 6. (a) Coupons shall be printed in such denominations as may be determined to be necessary, and shall be issued only to households which have been duly certified as eligible to participate in the food stamp program.

(b) Coupons issued to eligible households shall be used by them only to purchase food in retail food stores which have been approved for participation in the food stamp program at prices prevailing in such stores: *Provided*, That nothing in this Act shall be construed as authorizing the Secretary to specify the prices at which food may be sold by wholesale food concerns or retail food stores.

(c) Coupons issued to eligible households shall be simple in design and shall include only such words or illustrations as are required to explain their purpose and define their denomination. The name of any public official shall not appear on such coupons.

VALUE OF THE COUPON ALLOTMENT AND CHARGES TO BE MADE

Sec. 7. (a) The face value of the coupon allotment which State agencies shall be authorized to issue to households certified as eligible to participate in the food stamp program shall be in such amount as will provide such households with an opportunity more nearly to obtain a low-cost nutritionally adequate diet.

(b) Households shall be charged such portion of the face value of the coupon allotment issued to them as is determined to be equivalent to their normal expenditures for food.

(c) The value of the coupon allotment provided to any eligible household which is in excess of the amount charged such households for such allotment shall not be considered to be income or resources for any purpose under any Federal or State laws including, but not limited to, laws relating to taxation, welfare, and public assistance programs.

(d) Funds derived from the charges made for the coupon allotment shall be promptly deposited in a manner prescribed in the regulations issued pursuant to this Act, in a separate account maintained in the Treasury of the United States for such purpose. Such deposits shall be available, without limitation to fiscal years, for the redemption of coupons.

APPROVAL OF RETAIL FOOD STORES AND WHOLESALE FOOD CONCERNS

Sec. 8. (a) Regulations issued pursuant to this Act shall provide for the submission of applications for approval by retail food stores and wholesale food concerns which desire to be authorized to accept and redeem coupons under the food stamp program and for the approval of those applicants whose participation will effectuate the purposes of the food stamp program. In determining the qualifications of applicants there shall be considered among such other factors as may be appropriate, the following: (1) the nature and extent of the retail or wholesale food business conducted by the applicant; (2) the volume of coupon business which may reasonably be expected to be conducted by the applicant retail food store or wholesale food concern; and (3) the business integrity and reputation of the applicant. Approval of an applicant shall be evidenced by the issuance to such applicant of a nontransferable certificate of approval.

(b) Regulations issued pursuant to this Act shall require an applicant retail food store or wholesale food concern to submit information which will permit a determination to be made as to whether such applicant qualifies, or continues to qualify, for approval under the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act. Regulations issued pursuant to this Act shall provide for safeguards which restrict the use or disclosure of information obtained under the authority granted by this subsection to purposes directly connected with administration and enforcement of the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act.

(c) Any retail food store or wholesale food concern which as failed upon application to receive approval to participate in the food stamp program may obtain a hearing on such refusal as provided in section 13 of this Act.

REDEMPTION OF COUPONS

Sec. 9. Regulations issued pursuant to this Act shall provide for the redemption of coupons accepted by retail food stores through approved wholesale food concerns or through banks, with the cooperation of the Treasury Department.

ADMINISTRATION

Sec. 10. (a) All practicable efforts shall be made in the administration of the food stamp program to insure that participants use their increased food purchasing power to obtain those staple foods most needed in their diets, and particularly to encourage the continued use of those in abundant or surplus supply so as not to reduce the total consumption of surplus commodities which have been made available through direct distribution. In addition to such steps as may be taken administratively, the voluntary cooperation of existing Federal, State, local, or private agencies which carry out informational and educational programs for consumers shall be enlisted.

(b) The State agency of each participating State shall assume responsibility for the certification of applicant households and for the issuance of coupons: *Provided*, That the State agency may, subject to State law, delegate its responsibility in connection with the issuance of coupons to another agency of the State government. There shall be kept such records as may be necessary to ascertain whether the program is being conducted in compliance with the provisions of this Act and the regulations issued pursuant to this Act. Such records shall be available for inspection and audit at any reasonable time and shall be preserved for such period of time, not in excess of three years, as may be specified in the regulations.

(c) In the certification of applicant households for the food stamp program there shall be no discrimination against any household by reason of race, religious creed, national origin, or political beliefs.

(d) Participating States or participating political subdivisions thereof shall not decrease welfare grants or other similar aid extended to any person or persons as a consequence of such person's or persons' participation in benefits made available under the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act.

(e) The State agency of each State desiring to participate in the food stamp program shall submit for approval a plan of operation specifying the manner in which such program will be conducted within the State, the political subdivisions within the State in which the State desires to conduct the program, and the effective dates of participation by each such political subdivision. In addition, such plan of operation shall provide, among such other provisions as may by regulation be required, the following: (1) the specific standards to be used in determining the eligibility of applicant households; (2) that the State agency shall undertake the certification of applicant households in accordance with the general procedures and personnel standards used by them in the certification of applicants for benefits under the federally aided public assistance programs; (3) safeguards which restrict the use or disclosure of information obtained from applicant households to persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act; and (4) for the submission of such reports and other information as may from time to time be required. In approving the participation of the subdivisions requested by each State in its plan of operation, the Secretary shall provide for an equitable and orderly expansion among the several States in accordance with their relative need and readiness to meet their requested effective dates of participation.

(f) If the Secretary determines that in the administration of the program there is a failure by a State agency to comply substantially with the provisions of this Act, or with the regulations issued pursuant to this Act, or with the State plan of operation, he shall inform such State agency of such failure and shall allow the State agency a reasonable period of time for the correction of such failure. Upon the expiration of such period, the Secretary shall direct that there be no further issuance of coupons in the political subdivisions where such failure has occurred until such time as satisfactory corrective action has been taken.

(g) If the Secretary determines that there has been gross negligence or fraud on the part of the State agency in the certification of applicant households, the State shall upon request of the Secretary deposit into the separate account authorized by section 7 of this Act, a sum equal to the amount by which the value of any coupons issued as a result of such negligence or fraud exceeds the amount that was charged for such coupons under section 7(b) of this Act.

DISQUALIFICATION OF RETAIL FOOD STORES AND WHOLESALE FOOD CONCERNS

Sec. 11. Any approved retail food store or wholesale food concern may be disqualified from further participation in the food stamp program on a finding, made as specified in the regulations, that such store or concern has violated any of the provisions of this Act, or of the regulations issued pursuant to this Act. Such disqualification shall be for such period of time as may be determined in accordance with regulations issued pursuant to this Act. The action of disqualification shall be subject to review as provided in section 13 of this Act.

DETERMINATION AND DISPOSITION OF CLAIMS

Sec. 12. The Secretary shall have the power to determine the amount of and settle and adjust any claim and to compromise or deny all or part of any such claim or claims arising under the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND JUDICIAL REVIEW

Sec. 13. Whenever—

(a) an application of a retail food store or wholesale food concern to participate in the food stamp program is denied,

(b) a retail food store or a wholesale food concern is disqualified under the provisions of section 11 of this Act, or

(c) all or part of any claim of a retail food store or wholesale food concern is denied under the provisions of section 12 of this Act, notice of such administrative action shall be issued to the retail food store or wholesale food concern involved. Such notice shall be delivered by certified mail or personal service. If such store or concern is aggrieved by such action, it may, in accordance with regulations promulgated under this Act, within ten days of the date of delivery of such notice, file a written request for an opportunity to submit information in support of its position to such person or persons as the regulations may designate. If such a request is not made or if such store or concern fails to submit information in support of its position after filing a request, the administrative determination shall be final. If such a request is made by such store or concern, such information as may be submitted by the store or concern, as well as such other information as may be available, shall be reviewed by the person or persons designated, who shall, subject to the right of judicial review hereinafter provided, make a determination which shall be final and which shall take effect fifteen days after the date of the delivery or service of such final notice of determination. If the store or concern feels aggrieved by such final determination he may obtain judicial review thereof by filing a complaint against the United States in the United States district court for the district in which he resides or is engaged in business, or in any court of record of the State having competent jurisdiction, within thirty days after the date of delivery or service of the final notice of determination upon him, requesting the court to set aside such determination. The copy of the summons and complaint required to be delivered to the official or agency whose order is being attacked shall be sent to the Secretary or such person or persons as he may designate to receive service of process. The suit in the United States district court or State court shall be a trial de novo by the court in which the court shall determine the validity of the questioned administrative action in issue. If the court determines that such administrative action is invalid it shall enter such judgment or order as it determines is in accordance with the law and the evidence. During the pendency of such judicial review, or any appeal therefrom, the administrative action under review shall be and remain in full force and effect, unless an application to the court on not less than ten days' notice, and after hearing thereon and a showing of irreparable injury, the court temporarily stays such administrative action pending disposition of such trial or appeal.

VIOLATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

Sec. 14. (a) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this Act, the Secretary may provide for the issuance or presentment for redemption of coupons to such person or persons, and at such times and in such manner, as he deems necessary or appropriate to protect the interests of the United States or to insure enforcement of the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act.

(b) Whoever knowingly uses, transfers, acquires, or possesses coupons in any manner not authorized by this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act shall, if such coupons are of the value of \$100 or more, be guilty of a felony and shall, upon conviction thereof, be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned for not more than five years, or both, or, if such coupons are of a value of less than \$100, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall, upon conviction thereof, be fined not more than \$5,000 or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both.

(c) Whoever presents, or causes to be presented, coupons for payment or redemption of the value of \$100 or more, knowing the same to have been received, transferred, or used in any manner in violation of the provisions of this Act or the regulations issued pursuant to this Act shall be guilty of a felony and shall, upon conviction thereof, be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned for not more than five years, or both, or, if such coupons are of a value of less than \$100, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall, upon conviction thereof, be fined not more than \$5,000 or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both.

(d) Coupons issued pursuant to this Act shall be deemed to be obligations of the United States within the meaning of title 18, United States Code, section 8.

COOPERATION WITH STATE AGENCIES

Sec. 15. (a) Each State shall be responsible for financing, from funds available to the State or political subdivision thereof, the costs of carrying out the administrative responsibilities assigned to it under the provisions of this Act. Except as provided for in subsection (b) of this section, such costs shall include, but shall not be limited to, the certification of households; the acceptance, storage, and protection of coupons after their delivery to receiving points within the States; and the issuance of such coupons to eligible households and the control and accounting therefor.

(b) The Secretary is authorized to cooperate with State agencies in the certification of households which are not receiving any type of public assistance so as to insure the effective certification of such households in accordance with the eligibility standards approved under the provisions of section 10 of this Act. Such cooperation shall include payments to State agencies for part of the cost they incur in the certification of such households. The amount of such payment to any one State agency shall be 50 per centum of the sum of: (1) the direct salary cost (including the cost of such fringe benefits as are normally paid to its personnel by the State agency) of the personnel used to make such interviews and such postinterview field investigations as are necessary to certify the eligibility of such households; and of the immediate supervisor of such personnel, for such periods of time as they are employed in certifying the eligibility of such households; (2) travel and related costs incurred by such personnel in postinterview field investigations of such households; and (3) an amount not to exceed 25 per centum of the costs computed under (1) and (2) above.

APPROPRIATIONS

Sec. 16. (a) To carry out the provisions of this Act, there is hereby authorized to be appropriated not in excess of \$75,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1965; not in excess of \$100,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1966; and not in excess of \$200,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1967; and not in excess of such sum as may hereafter be authorized by Congress for any subsequent fiscal year. Such portion of any such appropriation as may be required to pay for the value of the coupon allotments issued to eligible households which is in excess of the charges paid by such households for such allotments shall be transferred to and made a part of the separate account created under section 7(d) of this Act.

(b) In any fiscal year, the Secretary shall limit the value of those coupons issued which is in excess of the value of coupons for which households are charged, to an amount which is not in excess of the portion of the appropriation for such fiscal year which is transferred to the separate account under the provisions of subsection (a) of this section. If in any fiscal year the Secretary finds that the requirements of participating States will exceed the limitation set forth herein, the Secretary shall direct State agencies to reduce the amount of such coupons to be issued to participating households to the extent necessary to comply with the provisions of this subsection.

(c) If the Secretary determines that any of the funds in the separate account created under section 7(d) of this Act are no longer required to carry out the provisions of this Act, such portion of such funds shall be paid into the miscellaneous receipts of the Treasury.

(d) Amounts expended under the authority of this Act shall not be considered amounts expended for the purpose of carrying out the agricultural price-support program and appropriations for the purposes of this Act shall be considered, for the purpose of budget presentations, to relate to the functions of the Government concerned with welfare.

Approved August 31, 1964.