



Frequently Asked Questions about CalFresh (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program)

Who, What, When, Why, How Much

1. What is CalFresh?

CalFresh is the new name in California for the Food Stamp Program, a federal food assistance program known nationally since 2008 as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP.

2. Who does CalFresh serve? Who is the target?

CalFresh serves the more than 3 million Californians who now participate in the Food Stamp Program.

We know that millions more qualify but do not know about it or, for a variety of reasons, have not applied.

3. What is the background of the CalFresh Program and name change for the Food Stamp Program?

In September 2008, AB 433 was signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger requiring the California Department of Social Services to modernize the name of the Food Stamp Program. The purpose was to create a positive new identity that encourages eligible Californians to use the program to purchase and enjoy a variety of healthy foods.

4. Who has been involved in the CalFresh legislation and name change?

Assembly members Jim Beall, Patti Berg, Mervyn Dymally, John Laird, and Sally Lieber, and Senator Patricia Wiggins sponsored AB 433 in 2008. The California Food Policy Advocates and The California Endowment supported renaming efforts and participated in the funding for this project. The California Department of Social Services brought together many stakeholders to develop the name, including program participants, county human services departments, and other advocacy organizations.

5. What does the CalFresh name and logo mean or depict? Why this name and logo?

The CalFresh name and logo capture the essence of our great state and our strong ties to agriculture. The name and logo bring to mind the essentials for a successful food assistance program: accessibility, simplicity, freshness, and empowerment. As one Food Stamp recipient said, "it is a name that encourages



you to eat fresh food.” It represents a healthy lifestyle and a “fresh” look for this important program

6. What is the logo supposed to be?

The CalFresh image is abstract by design. The warm colored circles are designed to be inclusive of the great variety of California fruits and vegetables available, not to represent specific produce.

The green shoots represent growth and capture the “freshness” of the brand. This abstract presentation is key to the “modern” element that stakeholders sought during the development of a “brand architecture.” The colors and images evoke the notions of “fresh” and “healthy” as expressed by participants in the rebranding process.

The CalFresh logo resonated well with the vast majority of those who participated in the testing. Given this positive reception from the target audience, this logo is poised to elicit the desired response when fully launched.

7. Why rename and rebrand the Food Stamp Program now?

California was prompted to make a change by federal and state law. In 2008, Congress passed the Farm Bill (Public Law 110-246) which included a provision that renamed the Food Stamp Program to the "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" (commonly known as SNAP).

States could use this federal name or choose another. California, like many other states, chose to explore other naming options. In 2008, the California legislature passed AB 433, which required the development of a name for California that reflected several facts: “stamps” no longer exist; the program supports healthy living; the program has benefits to California agriculture; and the program is a health and nutrition program.

In 2009, the state and stakeholders went through a process to explore naming options, including consideration of the name SNAP. This process included key informant interviews, focus group testing, and broader surveying on the various options.

As a result, starting in November 2010, we have “CalFresh – Better Food for Better Living.” And while legislation has driven the timing of this renaming, this effort could not have come at a more opportune economic time. The current crisis has increased attention and interest in food assistance. Over three million Californians now purchase food through the program. At the same time, economic experts, policymakers, and the press have been touting the economic



stimulus benefits of the Food Stamp Program. Every \$1 in benefits generates \$1.79 in much needed economic activity.

With the increased relevance of the program, the launch of the new name comes at a time when it can have the greatest impact on participants, on health, on California agriculture, and on the economy.

8. Why did the Legislature choose CalFresh?

The Legislature did not choose CalFresh. Unlike what occurred in Congress with SNAP, a specific name was not legislated for California. The Legislature directed the Department of Social Services to convene stakeholders to develop the name and encouraged the state to undergo testing of the options.

As a result, the name CalFresh came from the visual images that the Food Stamp Program recipients and others brought to the process. Images of “fresh” and “healthy” foods that low-income Californians wanted to be able to afford came up during the process. The “Cal” part of CalFresh came from key stakeholders who wanted to build upon the positive naming structure currently in place for Medi-Cal, CalWorks and other programs.

CalFresh, as well as other names and logos, went through a careful testing and surveying process. CalFresh generated an outstanding response. To complete the process, the State Health and Human Services Agency made the final recommendation to reflect all of this input.

9. What is this effort going to cost and who is going to pay for it?

Private foundation funding supported the development of the new name. The California Endowment generously provided the resources for the surveying, testing, and development. The design team and researchers were funded with these private funds.

Going forward, two strategies will be employed to manage costs. First, existing supplies of materials with the current name will be exhausted. Counties that have stocked up applications and other materials with the old name can continue to use them. Community partners can decide how they want to spend their resources. Some may choose to exhaust supplies, others may use stickers to rebrand existing materials, and still others may move more quickly and develop new materials.

The second strategy is to use the current Food Stamp outreach funding structure to support the rebranding effort. The federal Food and Nutrition Service has already approved funds in California’s 2011 Outreach Plan to create marketing



campaigns that will focus on rolling out the new name. The funds will support activities that range from: updating print materials, conducting radio buys, creating radio vignettes and conducting media and technical training for CalFresh outreach staff and community partners.

The state has taken the most fiscally responsible approach during the budget crisis. Either way, California would have had to expend energy and resources to change to the new federal name. Instead, the state chose to channel that energy and those resources into a name that worked for California. This approach has allowed the state to leverage private resources and to manage costs during these times of tight state budgeting.

The Program Is Evolving

10. Has there been a change in the Food Stamp Program with the new name and brand?

CalFresh demonstrates how significantly the Food Stamp Program has changed to benefit working families, families with school-age children, and homes with elderly or disabled members. CalFresh will do more to reach out to low-income Californians, many of whom may be newly eligible due to the recession or unemployment.

These “fresh” changes include:

Since 2001, replacing paper coupons with a convenient electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card that is accepted by nearly 20,000 retail food stores and markets.

Making eligibility information more available through a statewide hotline, mass media, and nearly 100 community-based organizations, using more on-line applications, often waiving requirements for face-to-face interviews, creating county customer service call centers, and increasing the time period between certifications.

- c. Helping more families by considering only their incomes, without forcing them into poverty by spending all of their assets and resources first.
- d. Automatically enrolling school-aged children for school meal programs.

11. Aren't policy changes needed to improve the program, not public relations?

What we call the program is policy. This effort began in legislative process and will end there as the state will have to change existing statute to reflect the new name. It is a policy that affects not just participants, but retailers and the general public.



A new name was needed because other policy changes have indeed occurred. We don't have stamps anymore; we have EBT cards. In California, rules have been changed so that you can own a reliable car and get help. Households with children don't have to exhaust all of their resources before getting help. Many counties have moved to phone interviews and on-line applications and other innovative ways to apply. California is putting a new name on a program that is indeed new in many ways.

There is no doubt that more must be done to improve Food Stamp Program participation and administration in California. Changing the name does not preclude these efforts. In fact, we hope that it can provide new interest and support for additional policy changes. Rebranding the program in California is a sincere and thoughtful effort to put forth a vision for the future of the program.

CalFresh Benefits for Recipients

12. Do people currently on the Food Stamp Program have to reapply?

No. People using the Food Stamp Program do not need to reapply. They will be automatically enrolled in CalFresh, and will continue receiving benefits on their EBT cards for as long as they qualify.

13. What are the benefits for children and their health?

In particular, we want to do more to help children stay healthy. Access to nutritious food is a great beginning which helps them do better in school and helps keep adults healthy for work.

14. What are the economic benefits for low-income Californians?

CalFresh benefits help families stretch their food dollars to buy more healthy foods for the whole family. The amount per month a family receives is based on income, minus deductions for expenses like rental and utilities. An average family receives about \$110 per month per person for healthy food.

Qualifying for CalFresh

15. Who qualifies for CalFresh?

Income Limits

For October 1, 2010, through September 30, 2011, the income limits are below. If the household has mixed immigration statuses or a member who is elderly or disabled, the table below does not apply.



People in Household	Gross Income	Net Income
1	\$1,174	\$ 903
2	1,579	1,215
3	1,984	1,526
4	2,389	1,838
5	2,794	2,150
6	3,200	2,461
7	3,605	2,773
8	4,010	3,085
Each Add'l Person	+406	+312

Asset Limits

When you apply for CalFresh you can have up to \$2000 in savings or other assets.

If an income eligible family has a child less than 18 years old, living in the home, there is no asset limit. If you are 60 or older you can have up to \$3000 in assets. If you are a person with a disability you can have up to \$3000 in assets.

Note: These asset limits are under review by California Department of Social Services and are expected to increase.

16. Am I excluded from CalFresh if I work?

No, you may still qualify depending on your income. For information on CalFresh benefits call 1-877-847-3663 or visit www.calfresh.ca.gov. For information in Spanish call 1-888-9-COMIDA.

17. How do I find out if I qualify for CalFresh?

Even if you work full time, whether or not you have children, or if you are homeless, you and your family may still be eligible to receive CalFresh benefits. You are encouraged to learn more and see if CalFresh can help you take fresh advantage of this important nutrition program. For information on CalFresh benefits (formerly the Food Stamp Program), call 1-877-847-3663 or visit www.calfresh.ca.gov. For information in Spanish call 1-888-9-COMIDA.

18. Can I get CalFresh if I am not a citizen?

CalFresh is for legal residents of California who meet the eligibility requirements. Citizen children of immigrants may qualify. Certain non-citizens such as those admitted for humanitarian reasons and those admitted as permanent residents are eligible for CalFresh benefits. Eligible household members can get CalFresh



benefits even if other members of the household are not eligible.

CalFresh is available to most legal immigrants who have lived in the country for five (5) years; or are receiving disability-related assistance or benefits, regardless of entry date; or are children under 18 years of age regardless of entry date.

19. I am a senior. Can I qualify for CalFresh?

If you have a limited income, you may be eligible. You are not eligible if you get Supplemental Security Income (SSI), but Social Security Retirement benefits are ok. If you are not sure which type of benefits you receive, call Senior Legal Hotline for help at (800) 222-1753.

20. How are CalFresh Benefits received?

People who qualify for CalFresh benefits will receive them through Golden State Advantage, an electronic debit card (also called EBT) that they can use at most grocery stores and many farmers' markets. California has more than 110 farmers' markets in more than 200 locations that welcome CalFresh customers.

CalFresh Benefits the State

21. Why should we care if low-income Californians enroll in the CalFresh or the Food Stamp Program?

California wants to fully use every possible source of funding for its safety net programs. Federal benefit dollars not only provide critical nutrition assistance to California's neediest citizens, but also directly benefit local economies and jobs. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), every \$1 of additional federal food stamp benefits results in \$1.79 of new local economic activity.

Clear Up the Confusion

22. Won't it get confusing to have another name out there?

California already has experience using names that are different from the federal names. We operate Medi-Cal in California as our Medicaid program. We operate CalWORKs as our Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). We can take the lessons learned working with these programs and apply them to the roll out of CalFresh.

Twenty states do not use SNAP as the name of their Food Stamp Program. These other states have been able to successfully work through the challenges and potential confusion caused by using a different name.



Based on this experience, California will need to communicate that if a person is currently participating in the Food Stamp Program, he or she will now be participating in CalFresh. We know there may be initial confusion when people think the differently named state program is a brand new program. But we must stress that no reapplication is necessary for those currently enrolled. People don't need to get Food Stamp benefits and CalFresh benefits; rather their Food Stamp benefits will now simply be referred to as CalFresh. Knowing this, the state and counties can act to manage this change.

23. Isn't the name CalFresh misleading, given that not everything purchased with EBT cards is fresh?

CalFresh is a name, not an exhaustive list of purchasable foods. The "Fresh" portion of the name was designed to capture the images that participants shared of healthy living. It was designed to help promote the fresh changes to the program (no paper stamps, new rules, and new ways to apply, etc).

CalFresh also presents an opportunity to share a vision for the program. It helps Californians recognize that the program provides not just resources for food, but resources that can better support a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Using the name CalFresh doesn't prevent participants from buying frozen or canned meats or vegetables. But we do hope it provides participants and the public with a chance to look at Food Stamp purchases and the program in a new way.

24. If we have a name different from SNAP, won't we miss out on federal media buys and outreach materials?

Materials provided by the federal government can be modified to reflect a different state name. Twenty other states chose a different name than SNAP. Typically materials quickly note the state's version of a federal program, (i.e. "the federal SNAP program, known as CalFresh in California will...")

Who to Contact

25. How do I get more information about CalFresh?

For information on CalFresh benefits (formerly the Food Stamp Program), call 1-877-847-3663 or visit www.calfresh.ca.gov. For information in Spanish call 1-888-9-COMIDA.

26. Who do I contact to help me apply for CalFresh?



Call the statewide CalFresh information line at 1-877-847-FOOD (3663) to see if you qualify for CalFresh. For information in Spanish call 1-888-9-COMIDA (43-2 266.) Seniors can also call the Senior Legal Hotline at 1-800-222-1753.

Call or visit your county human services department. A majority of counties are also accepting online applications today, and all counties will be up and running with online applications by January 2011. To see if your county is accepting online applications, go to <https://c4yourself.com/c4yourself/counties.htm> for an interactive map.

Soda Purchase

27. Can CalFresh benefits be used to buy soda?

CalFresh follows federal SNAP law, which does not limit soda purchases.

New York City has asked USDA for permission to test limitations on soda purchases with food stamp/SNAP benefits. USDA has not yet responded.

California has taken a different approach to using the Food Stamp Program to improve health. In 2005, Californians began developing a proposal to test incentives in the Food Stamp Program to see if additional resources could make healthier choices easier choices for low-income households. Based on research at the time, affordability was a key barrier for California Food Stamp households trying to meet recommended levels of fruit and vegetable intake.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the California State Legislature put this idea into law in 2006. Unfortunately, the Healthy Purchase Pilot was established in state statute just as our state's fiscal crisis hit. To implement this vision, the state had to look elsewhere for funding. Thankfully, Congress was similarly interested in examining the California approach and put \$20 million in funding for this purpose into the last Farm Bill. Despite our leadership on this issue, California had to compete with other states for this funding. In August 2010, Massachusetts was awarded the incentive funding. We are excited for the results of this effort, though it will be several years before we will have clear outcomes.

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