GENERAL INFORMATION SYSTEM
Center for Employment & Economic Supports

September 28, 2011

TO: Commissioners; TA & FS Directors; WMS Coordinators; CAP Coordinators

FROM: Russell Sykes, Deputy Commissioner, Center for Employment and Economic Supports

SUBJECT: Disaster Food Stamp Benefits Program of 2011Questions and Answers

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: FS Questions – Food Stamp Policy Bureau (518) 473-1469

Purpose

The purpose of this GIS is to provide the designated social services districts approved to operate a Disaster Food Stamp Benefit Program (DFSBP) as a result of either Hurricane Irene or Tropical Storm Lee clarifications and responses to questions asked by workers in these districts.

Q1. Our county has not really had many applications. Are we required to make the DFSBP applications available for the scheduled seven days?

A1. Yes. The federal government requires that the DFSBP be operated uniformly across all districts for which it is approved. We understand that for some counties the need for the DFSBP is much less critical than for others. Applications still must be available to any household that might qualify for the DFSBP throughout the seven day period that the program is in operation.

Q2. In our county the Red Cross and the DSS have been giving out food vouchers to households that have an emergency need for food. Can households that have received one or more of these vouchers still get the disaster FS benefits?

A2. Yes, absolutely. And the amount of such vouchers should not be considered income.

Q4. Can immigrants who are ineligible for the regular Food Stamp Program receive Disaster Food Stamp Benefits?

A4. Yes, citizenship and alien status are not considered when determining eligibility for the DFSBP. As long as they meet all other requirements (resident of affected county, income, affected by the disaster, etc.), non-citizens, regardless of immigration status, may participate in the DFSBP. Sanctioned or disqualified individuals and ineligible students also may participate in the DFSBP.

Q5. We are having applicants from neighboring counties come in looking to file applications both for the DFSBP and the regular Food Stamp Program. How should we handle this?

A5. For the DFSBP, you may accept and process an application for someone who is not or was not a resident of your county as long as they resided in one of the districts approved to operate a DFSBP and meet all other eligibility requirements for the DFSBP.

For households wishing to apply for the regular Food Stamp Program, you may accept a "courtesy" application and forward it to the county of residence for processing. Likewise, for applicants for ongoing TA and/or MA, you may accept a "courtesy" application and forward it to the county of residence. For TA, if the applicant has an immediate need, the county where the applicant is applying must address the immediate need. In this case, the neighbouring county where the person is applying is not considered the "where found" district for fiscal responsibility, but must meet the immediate need and then work with the county of residence to secure reimbursement.

Q6. Can we accept requests for a DFSBP supplement from a current food stamp recipient from a neighboring county?

A6. Yes, you may accept a courtesy request for a DFSBP supplement from a recipient from a neighboring county as long as they resided in one of the districts approved to operate a DFSBP and meet all other eligibility requirements for the DFSBP supplement. To make a request the recipient should sign the certification and signature section of Part H of the disaster application and attest that benefits have been affected by the disaster, or sign the "DISASTER FOOD STAMP BENEFITS ASSISTANCE AFFIDAVIT OR LOSS OF INCOME/DISASTER RELATED EXPENSES," form. The request for a DFSBP supplement must be forwarded to the county of residence for processing of the supplement payment on the active FS case.

Q7. Can we accept requests for food stamp replacements from a current recipient from a neighboring county?

A7. Yes, you may accept courtesy requests filed on the LDSS-2291 "Request for Replacement of Food Purchased with Food Stamp Benefits," for replacement of food stamp benefits for someone who is not a resident of your county. The completed LDSS-2291 must be forwarded to the county of residence for processing.

Q8. Can a household apply for both ongoing food stamp benefits and the DFSBP?

A8. Yes, but they would have to file two applications: the DFSBP application for the disaster benefits for September and either the common application (LDSS-2921) or the Food Stamp Application/Recertification (LDSS-4826) in order to get recurring benefits for October and beyond. Any DFSBP applicant that appears to be eligible for ongoing benefits should be provided with either the LDSS-2921 or LDSS-4826 and encouraged to also apply for ongoing food stamp benefits.

Q9. How are applications for recurring food stamps processed for an individual or family that receives a DFSBP benefit for September?

A9. DFSBP applicants who file a LDSS-4826 or LDSS-2921 to apply for ongoing food stamp benefits who meet food stamp eligibility requirements should have their application processed as a recertification. **Households that file a DFSBP application and are approved for DFSBP should be given a LDSS-4826 to facilitate the recertification process.**

Q10. The DFSBP benefit period is for September. The DFSBP is running at the very end of September. The month is almost over. What do we do if we give a household approved for DFSBP a recertification application for regular food stamp benefits and they submit it – say – on October 15th?

A10. Process it as you would any recertification application that has been filed after the last day of the old certification period. That is, that the application still may be processed as a recertification. Benefits would be pro-rated from the date of re-application. See Section 6, page 139, of the Food Stamp Source Book for more details.

Q11. If we have a household that filed an application prior to the disaster (say before 8/27/11), that is still pending, how should we process that case?

A11. Issue pro-rated benefits for August and a single issuance equal to maximum monthly allotment for the household size for September and then a benefit in the amount of what will be the regular recurring benefit for October and beyond.

Q12. Can multiple food stamp households residing in a single dwelling affected by the disaster each apply and receive DFSBP benefits?

A12 Yes, if the households each meet the DFSBP eligibility requirements they can each receive a DFSBP benefit.

Q13. We know that all adult applicants should be coded "Work Exempt" for Employability. Can ABAWDs who have exhausted their months to receive food stamp benefits apply for the DFSBP and get benefits?

A13. Yes, ABAWD's can apply for and receive disaster food stamp benefits even if they normally would be ineligible to receive regular food stamp benefits due to time limits.

Q14. What Reason Code should we use when issuing DFSBP benefits to generate a proper notice? What about replacement benefits?

A14. When issuing DFSBP benefits, you should used an appropriate opening Reason Code with an 'N – No Notice' in the Notice Indicator field on Screen 1 of WMS to suppress the notice. The "Action Taken on Your Disaster Food Stamp Benefits Case" notice that was provided to each district as a hardcopy will serve as a client notice for both approvals and denials.

When issuing replacement (Payment Type 92 with 'J' in the Special Claiming Category code field) FS benefits, no notice is required.

Q15. When writing a payment line on Screen 6 of WMS using Payment Type Code 92 to issue replacement food stamp benefits we get an error message saying that we need to enter a recoupment amount. How should we handle this?

A15. It's true. You will need to enter a recoupment amount. You should enter $0.00 and the error will go away. As stated in GIS 06 TA/DC022, we will not recoup from either replacement FS benefits or disaster FS benefits issued in response to the disaster.

Q16. Are paper copies of DFSBP applications and other materials required if the documents have been imaged?

A16. No, paper copies are not necessary provided imaged copies have been made and are available for review.

Q17. What number should we call if we have questions related to WMS connectivity?

A17. During normal business hours (Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) you may call the WMS Helpline at 1-800-342-3010. On weekends you may call the OFT Enterprise Help Desk at 1-800-697-1323.

Q18. What number should customers call if they have questions related to EBT?

A18. Call the EBT Customer Service Helpline at 1-888-328-6399. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The system will provide you with account balance information, PIN selection, transaction information and various other services. Operators are also available to assist you for reporting cards lost, or stolen.

Q19. If a DFSBP participant encounters difficulty when swiping their EBT card when making purchases will the store permit them to enter the card number manually?

A19. Yes, stores are permitted to manually enter EBT card numbers for food purchases <u>provided that the card is present</u> (not just a written down card number). Remember, the PIN should never be shared with the store clerk. It is strongly recommended that cardholders whose cards are not working properly replace the card by contacting their local office worker. At the same time the cardholder should be advised to report the card damaged by calling the EBT Customer Service Helpline. This will prevent the use of the card until it is replaced by your local district worker.

Q20. Where can I go to find more instructions on DFSBP?

A20. Additional information including, the DFSBP Plan, forms, GISs, EBT information and other related material can be found at the following link:

http://otda.state.nyenet/dta/Disaster/Disastersb.html