

regulations. For purposes of this part, established reservation means the geographically defined area(s) currently recognized and established by Federal or State treaty or by Federal statute whereby such geographically defined area(s) is set aside for the use of Indians. Where such established areas exist, the appropriate ITO is presumed to exercise governmental jurisdiction, unless otherwise determined by FNS.

(2) The appropriate ITO for other areas, in order to qualify as reservations for the provisions of this part, must show to FNS:

(i) That the ITO exercises governmental jurisdiction over a geographic area(s) which enjoys legal recognition from the Federal or a State government and is set aside for the use of Indians;

(ii) A clear and precise description of the boundaries of such geographic area(s).

(d) *Application by an ITO.* Any ITO which desires to participate in the Food Distribution Program shall file an application with the FNS Regional Office serving the State or States in which the reservation is located. The ITO shall specify if it is requesting the Food Distribution Program alone or concurrently with the Food Stamp Program. The ITO shall also specify whether it wants either or both programs on all or part of the reservation, and if on part, shall describe the geographic boundaries of the relevant part(s). Additionally, if the ITO wishes to serve areas near the reservation, the ITO shall describe the geographic boundaries of the near area(s) for FNS review and approval. Any urban place inside a reservation can be served by the Food Distribution Program. Any urban place outside reservation boundaries may not be served. However, an ITO or State agency can request the Department to change those limitations with justification. The ITO application shall also provide other information requested by FNS, including but not limited to, that the ITO serves an established reservation or a reservation otherwise qualified as described in paragraph (c) of this section. Properly addressed applications shall be acknowledged by the FNS Regional Of-

fice in writing within five working days of receipt.

(e) *Tribal capability.* (1) In determining whether the ITO on a given reservation is potentially capable of effectively and efficiently administering a Food Distribution Program, allowing for fulfillment of that potential through training and technical assistance, FNS shall consult with other sources, such as the BIA, and shall consider the ITO's experience, if any, in operating other government programs and its management and fiscal capabilities. Other factors for evaluation include, but are not limited to, the ITO's ability to:

(i) Order and properly store commodities,

(ii) Certify eligible households,

(iii) Arrange for physical issuance of commodities,

(iv) Keep appropriate records and submit required reports,

(v) Budget and account for administrative funds,

(vi) Determine the food preferences of households, and

(vii) Conduct on-site reviews of certification and distribution procedures and practices.

(2) The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) shall make a determination of potential Indian Tribal Organization (ITO) capability within 30 days of receipt of a completed application for the Food Distribution Program. FNS shall promptly advise ITOs of the need for additional information if an incomplete application is received.

(3) FNS shall, if requested by an ITO which has been determined by FNS to be potentially capable of administering a Food Distribution Program, provide the ITO's designees with appropriate training and technical assistance to prepare the ITO to take over program administration. In determining what training and technical assistance are necessary, FNS shall consult with the ITO and other sources, such as the BIA.

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979, as amended by Amdt. 163, 45 FR 14006, Mar. 4, 1980. Redesignated and amended by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982]

§ 253.5 State agency requirements.

(a) *Plan of operation.* (1) The State agency that assumes responsibility for

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the Food Distribution Program shall submit a plan of operation for approval by FNS. Approval of the plan shall be a prerequisite to the donation of commodities available for use by households under part 250 of this chapter. The approved plan shall be considered permanent, with amendments to be added as changes in State agency administration or management of the program, as described in the plan, are made, or at the request of FNS. No amendment to the plan of operation of any State agency shall be effective without prior approval of FNS, and FNS may require amendment of any plan as a condition of continuing approval. If the agency is not an ITO, the appropriate agency of the State government shall also:

(i) Consult in good faith with the ITO on the reservation where the appropriate agency of the State government is responsible for administering the Food Distribution Program.

(ii) A State agency which is not an ITO shall submit its plan of operation, budget and any substantive subsequent amendments to the ITO for comment at least 45 days prior to submission of the plan, budget or amendment to FNS. Comments by the ITO shall be attached to the plan, budget or amendment which is submitted to FNS. This paragraph does not apply to amendments required by FNS under § 253.7(a)(1).

(2) The plan of operation shall describe the manner in which commodities will be distributed, including, but not limited to, the storage and distribution facilities to be used, the procedures to assure ongoing consultation with the ITO where the appropriate agency of the State government administers the Program, the method by which the food preferences of households shall be determined, the manner in which the State agency plans to supervise the Food Distribution Program, and plans by which the State agency will control dual participation. The plan shall also include by reference or otherwise the following assurances:

(i) No household on any Indian reservation shall be permitted to participate simultaneously in the Food Stamp Program and the Food Distribution Program.

(ii) The value of the commodities provided to any eligible household shall not be considered income or resources for any purposes under any Federal, State, or local laws, including, but not limited to, laws relating to taxation, welfare, and public assistance programs; and no State agency shall decrease any assistance otherwise provided to a household because of the receipt of commodities.

(iii) The distribution of commodities shall not be used as a means for furthering the political interest of any individual or party.

(iv) There shall be no discrimination in the certification of applicant households or in the distribution of commodities because of sex, race, color, age, political beliefs, religion, handicap or national origin.

(v) Households shall not be required to make any payments in money, materials or services for, or in connection with, the receipt of commodities; and they shall not be solicited in connection with the receipt of commodities for voluntary cash contributions for any purpose.

(vi) Adequate personnel, including supervisory personnel, to review the Food Distribution Program shall be provided to ensure compliance with the requirements of this part.

(vii) Use of disclosure of information obtained from food distribution applicant households, exclusively for the Food Distribution Program, shall be restricted to persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the provisions of the Food Distribution Programs as defined in this part of this subchapter, the Food Stamp Act or regulations, or with other Federal or federally aided, means-tested assistance programs such as title IV-A (TANF), XIX (Medicaid), or XVI (SSI), or with general assistance programs that are subject to the joint processing requirements specified in § 273.2(j)(2).

(b) *Operating manuals.* The State agency shall maintain ongoing consultation with the ITO in developing the State agency's written internal policies, instructions, and forms which are necessary to carry out the Food Distribution Program and shall submit them to FNS for approval prior to their

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use. The State agency shall file any comments or recommendations offered by the ITO, for review by FNS.

(c) *Staffing.* Personnel used in the certification process shall be employed in accordance with (1) the current standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration or any standards later prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management under section 208 of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 or (2) when appropriate, the ITO's personnel system if it incorporates the basic elements of a merit system.

(d) *Bilingual requirements.* (1) The State agency shall provide bilingual staff, certification forms, including the application form and certification notices as specified in §253.7(a)(2) and (b)(3), respectively, and any form developed by the State agency for reporting changes in household composition and income, pursuant to §253.7(c), and outreach materials, when either an estimated 100 or more low income households or the majority of low-income households on the reservation are a single language minority. Single-language minority refers to households which speak the same non-English language and which do not contain adults(s) fluent in English as a second language. If the non-English language is spoken but not written, the State agency shall provide bilingual staff, if required, but not bilingual material.

(2) The State agency shall ensure that offices serving reservations subject to the criteria in paragraph (d)(1) of this section provide sufficient bilingual staff for the timely processing of non-English speaking applicants.

(3) The State agency shall develop estimates of the numbers of low-income, single-language minority households by using census data (including the Census Bureau's Current Population Report: Population Estimates and Projections, Series P-25, No. 627) and knowledge of the reservation. Local Bureau of Census offices, Community Services Administration offices, Community Action agencies, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Services, planning agencies, the ITO and school officials may be important sources of information in determining the need for bilingual services.

(e) *Outreach and referral.* The State agency shall inform potentially eligible households of the availability of the Food Distribution Program. The State agency shall develop and distribute printed information in the appropriate languages about the Program and eligibility requirements. Outreach material shall contain information about a household's right to file an application on the same date it contacts the certification office. The State agency shall be sufficiently familiar with general eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) or the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, if available to reservation residents, the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI), and appropriate public and general assistance programs, to identify those applicants whose households contain persons who may be eligible for these programs, to inform the applicants of their potential eligibility, and to provide the applicants with the addresses and telephone numbers for these programs. For example, the State agency should provide information on the WIC program to applicants whose households contain pregnant women, nursing or postpartum women, or children up to the fifth birthday.

(f) *Training requirements.* The State agency shall institute a training program for all personnel who are assigned responsibility for the certification of applicant households, for fair hearing officers, for field supervisors who review local Food Distribution Programs, for those involved in outreach and those responsible for ordering, storing, and distributing commodities.

(1) State agency training programs shall cover eligibility criteria, certification procedures, commodity ordering, storage and distribution practices, household rights and responsibilities and other job-related responsibilities. The content of the training material shall be reviewed and revised periodically to correct deficiencies in program operations or reflect changes in policy and procedures.

(2) FNS shall review the effectiveness of State agency training based on information obtained from field reviews,

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administrative analyses and other sources.

(g) *Nutrition education.* The State agency shall publicize how commodities may be used to contribute to a nutritious diet and how commodities may be properly stored by means of visual displays, and printed material. The State agency shall encourage appropriate organizations, county extension home economists, expanded Food and Nutrition Program aides, and qualified volunteers to provide food and nutrition information, menus, or cooking demonstrations, as appropriate for participating households. The State agency shall encourage the dissemination of food and nutrition information designed to improve the nutrition of households on reservations.

(h) *Records and reports.* The State agency shall keep records and submit reports and other information as required by FNS. Records required under this part shall be retained for a period of three years from the date of the submission of the annual financial status report, SF-269; except that, if any litigation, claim or audit is started before the expiration of the three year period, the records shall be retained until all litigation, claims or audit findings involving the records have been resolved.

(i) *Monitoring.* In accordance with its responsibility for efficient and effective program administration the State agency shall monitor and review its operations under this part to ensure compliance with the provisions of this part and with any applicable instructions of FNS.

(1) The State agency shall review program operations at least annually, document program deficiencies and establish and implement specific plans of corrective action for deficiencies noted.

(2) Reviews of operations shall include, but not be limited to, certification of households, determination of food preferences, distribution of commodities, fair hearing procedures, commodity inventories and timeliness and accuracy of reports to FNS.

(3) Program reviews and corrective action plans shall be available to FNS upon request.

(j) *Investigations and complaints.* The State agency shall promptly inves-

tigate complaints received of irregularities in the handling, distribution, receipt or use of commodities, other than use of commodities by eligible households in the preparation of meals for home consumption, and shall take appropriate action to correct any irregularities. The State agency shall also promptly investigate complaints of irregularities relating to certification procedures or the delivery of services and shall take appropriate action to correct any irregularities or non-compliance with provisions relating to certification procedures, provision of services or household rights. The State agency shall document each investigation and action in sufficient detail to allow for FNS review of all State agency actions and information. The Department shall make investigations at the request of the State agency and ITO or when the Department determines an investigation is necessary.

(k) *Sanctions.* If the State agency fails to comply with the provisions of this part or its plan of operation, FNS may:

(1) Take action against any State agency under § 253.11(g) with respect to administrative funds available from FNS for use by the State agency or (2) disqualify the State agency from further distribution of commodities to households. Disqualification of the State agency shall not prevent FNS or the Department from taking other actions, including prosecution under applicable Federal statutes, when deemed necessary. Reinstatement shall be contingent upon approval by FNS of the State agency's plan for corrective action or determination by FNS that the State agency has complied with any other requirements for reinstatement which FNS may set forth. These provisions apply to all State agencies, regardless of whether the Program is administered by an agency of the State government or an ITO. If the ITO is disqualified as a State agency, an appropriate agency of State government shall administer the Food Distribution Program on the reservation. If an agency of State government is disqualified as the State agency for the Food Distribution Program on the reservation,

the ITO may request in writing a capability determination for program administration in accordance with §253.4.

(1) *Appeals.* (1) The agency of the State government or an ITO may appeal an initial determination by FNS on:

(i) Whether or not the reservation definition is met;

(ii) The capability of an ITO to administer the Food Distribution Program;

(iii) Sanctions taken under paragraph (k) of this section or §253.11(g); or

(iv) The Federal matching percentage level of administrative funding made available by FNS.

(2) At the time FNS advises the State agency or ITO of its determination, FNS shall also advise the State agency or ITO of its right to appeal and, except for appeals of funding determinations, shall advise the State agency or ITO of its right to request either a meeting to present its position in person or a review of the record. On appeals of funding determinations, FNS shall advise the State agency or ITO that it may indicate if it wishes a meeting, however, FNS need schedule a meeting only if FNS determines a meeting is warranted to reach a proper adjudication of the matter. Otherwise, FNS shall review supportive information submitted by the State agency or ITO in paragraph (1)(3)(ii) of this section.

(3) *Procedure—(i) Time limit.* Any State agency or ITO that wants to appeal an initial FNS determination under paragraph (1) of this section must notify the Administrator of FNS, in writing, within 15 days from the date of the determination. If the appeal concerns either paragraph (1)(1) (i) or (ii) of this section, the implementation timeframes as specified in § paragraph (m) of this section and the timeframe for determining an ITO's capability as specified in §253.4(e)(2) are suspended from the date the appeal is requested to the date of the final determination.

(ii) *Acknowledgment.* Within five days of receipt by the Administrator, of FNS, of a request for review, FNS shall provide the State agency or ITO with a written acknowledgment of the request by certified mail, return receipt requested. The acknowledgment shall in-

clude the name and address of the official designated by the Administrator, FNS, to review the appeal. The acknowledgment shall also notify the State agency or ITO that within ten days of receipt of the acknowledgment, the State agency or ITO shall submit written information in support of its position.

(4) *Scheduling a meeting.* If the Administrator, FNS, grants a meeting FNS shall advise the State agency or ITO of the time, date and location of the meeting by certified mail, return receipt requested at least ten days in advance of the meeting. FNS shall schedule and conduct the meeting and make a decision within 60 days of the receipt of the information submitted in response to paragraph (1)(3)(ii) of this section.

(5) *Review.* If no meeting is conducted the official designated by the Administrator, FNS, shall review information presented by a State agency or ITO which requests a review and shall make a final determination in writing within 45 days of the receipt of the State agency's or ITO's information submitted in response to paragraph (1)(3)(ii) of this section setting forth in full the reasons for the determination.

(6) *Final decision.* The official's decision after a meeting or a review shall be final.

(m) *Implementation.* The State agency shall implement changes required by amendments to these regulations in accordance with schedules specified in the amendment.

(1) *Amendment 2.* (i) If an ITO currently participates in, but does not administer, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations:

(A) FNS shall determine tribal eligibility and capability to administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations within 60 days of receipt of a completed application. If an incomplete application is received, FNS shall within 15 days, notify the ITO of what additional information is required. The processing time for the capability determination shall start from the date the additional information is received by FNS.

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(B) Upon FNS' determination that the ITO will administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FNS shall expeditiously plan for and provide needed training and technical assistance to facilitate timely commencement of tribal administrative responsibilities. The ITO shall have 120 days from FNS' determination in paragraph (m)(1)(i)(A) of this section to submit and have approved a plan of operation, operating manuals, and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part. Extensions may be granted by FNS to ITOs if good cause is shown.

(C) If FNS determines that an ITO is not capable of administering the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FNS shall direct the State to continue program operations and submit a new plan of operation and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part within 120 days from FNS' determination in paragraph (m)(1)(i)(A) of this section.

(ii) If an ITO currently administers the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, the timeframes specified in paragraph (m)(1)(i) of this section apply except that:

(A) FNS shall determine tribal eligibility and capability to administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations within 30 days of receipt of a completed application.

(B) If FNS determines that the ITO will not administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FNS shall direct the ITO to continue program operations until the State government can commence program operations. The State government shall have 120 days from FNS' determination in paragraph (m)(1)(i)(A) of this section to submit and have approved a plan of operation and to commence program operations under the regulations as specified in this part.

(iii) If an ITO does not currently participate in a Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, the timeframes in paragraph (m)(1)(i) of this section apply except that if FNS determines that an ITO cannot administer the program, FNS shall direct the State to submit a plan of operation and to commence program operations

under the regulations as specified in this part within 180 days from the determination.

(iv) Extensions to the above implementation timeframe (except for those timeframes set forth in paragraphs (m)(1)(i)(A) and (ii)(A) of this section) may be granted by FNS to ITOs or State government agencies if there is compelling justification involving circumstances which were not reasonably foreseeable and which are not the fault of the ITO or the State agency and which circumstances present extraordinary problems that would render earlier implementation impossible.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 0584-0071)

(44 U.S.C. 3506; E.O. 12372, July 14, 1982, 47 FR 30959, sec. 401(b) of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968, 31 U.S.C. 6506(c))

[44 FR 35928, June 19, 1979, as amended at 47 FR 746, Jan. 7, 1982. Redesignated and amended by Amdt. 1, 47 FR 14137, Apr. 2, 1982; Amdt. 2, 47 FR 19665, May 7, 1982; 48 FR 29123, June 24, 1983; 62 FR 53731, Oct. 16, 1997; 64 FR 73383, Dec. 30, 1999; 65 FR 47833, Aug. 4, 2000]

§ 253.6 Eligibility of households.

(a) *Household concept.* (1) The State agency shall determine eligibility for the Food Distribution Program on a household basis. Household means any of the following individuals or groups of individuals, provided that such individuals or groups are not boarders or residents of an institution and provided that separate household or boarder status shall not be granted to a spouse of a member of the household, or to children under 18 years of age under the parental control of a member of the household.

(i) An individual living alone.

(ii) An individual living with others, but customarily purchasing food and preparing meals for home consumption separate and apart from the others.

(iii) A group of individuals living together for whom food is customarily purchased in common and for whom meals are prepared together for home consumption.

(2) *Nonhousehold members.* The following individuals residing with a household shall not be considered household members in determining the household's eligibility. Nonhousehold members specified in paragraphs (a)(2)