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(c) *Waivers.* (1) The Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service or Deputy Administrator for Family Nutrition Programs may authorize waivers to deviate from specific regulatory provisions. Requests for waivers may be approved only in the following situations:

(i) The specific regulatory provision cannot be implemented due to extraordinary temporary situations such as a sudden increase in the caseload due to the loss of SSI cash-out status;

(ii) FNS determines that the waiver would result in a more effective and efficient administration of the program; or

(iii) Unique geographic or climatic conditions within a State preclude effective implementation of the specific regulatory provision and require an alternate procedure; for example, the use of fee agents in Alaska to perform many of the duties involved in the certification of households including conducting the interviews.

(2) FNS shall not approve requests for waivers when:

(i) The waiver would be inconsistent with the provisions of the Act; or

(ii) The waiver would result in material impairment of any statutory or regulatory rights of participants or potential participants.

(3) FNS shall approve waivers for a period not to exceed one year unless the waiver is for an on-going situation. If the waiver is requested for longer than a year, appropriate justification shall be required and FNS will determine if a longer period is warranted and if so, the duration of the waiver. Extensions may be granted provided that States submit appropriate justification as part of the State Plan of Operation.

(4) When submitting requests for waivers, State agencies shall provide compelling justification for the waiver in terms of how the waiver will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration of the Program. At a minimum, requests for waivers shall include but not necessarily be limited to:

(i) Reasons why the waiver is needed;

(ii) The portion of caseload or potential caseload which would be affected and the characteristics of the affected

caseload such as geographic, urban, or rural concentration;

(iii) Anticipated impact on service to participants or potential participants who would be affected;

(iv) Anticipated time period for which the waiver is needed; and

(v) Thorough explanation of the proposed alternative provision to be used in lieu of the waived regulatory provision.

(5) Notwithstanding the preceding paragraphs, waivers of the certification period timeframes as described in §273.10(f) may be granted by the Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service or the Deputy Administrator for Family Nutrition Programs as provided in section 3(c) of the Act. Waivers authorized by this paragraph are not subject to the public comment provisions of §272.3(d).

(6) Notwithstanding the preceding paragraphs, waivers may be granted by the Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service or the Deputy Administrator for Family Nutrition Programs as provided in section 5(f) of the Act. Waivers authorized by this paragraph are not subject to the public comment provisions of §272.3(d).

(7) Notwithstanding the preceding paragraphs, waivers may be granted by the Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service or the Deputy Administrator for Family Nutrition Programs as provided in section 6(c) of the Act. Waivers authorized by this paragraph are not subject to the public comment provisions of §272.3(d).

(d) *Public comment.* State agencies shall solicit public input and comment on overall Program operations as State laws require or as the individual State agency believes would be useful.

[Amdt. 156, 46 FR 6315, Jan. 21, 1981]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting §272.3, see the List of CFR Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and on GPO Access.

§272.4 Program administration and personnel requirements.

(a) *Merit personnel.* (1) State agency personnel used in the certification process shall be employed in accordance with the current standards for a

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merit system of personnel administration or any standards later prescribed by the U.S. Civil Service Commission under section 208 of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970.

(2) State agency employees meeting the standards outlined in paragraph (a)(1) of this section shall perform the interviews required in § 273.2(e). Volunteers and other non-State agency employees shall not conduct certification interviews or certify food stamp applicants. Exceptions to the use of State merit system personnel in the interview and certification process are specified in § 273.2(k) for SSI households, § 272.7(d) for households residing in rural Alaska, and part 280 for disaster victims. State agencies are encouraged to use volunteers in activities such as outreach, prescreening, assisting applicants in the application and certification process, and in securing needed verification. Individuals and organizations who are parties to a strike or lockout, and their facilities, may not be used in the certification process except as a source of verification for information supplied by the applicant. Only authorized employees of the State agency, coupon issuers, coupon bulk storage points, and Federal employees involved in administration of the program shall be permitted access to food coupons, ATP's, or other issuance documents.

(b) *Bilingual requirements.* (1) Based on the estimated total number of low-income households in a project area which speak the same non-English language (a single-language minority), the State agency shall provide bilingual program information and certification materials, and staff or interpreters as specified in paragraphs (b) (2) and (3) of this section. Single-language minority refers to households which speak the same non-English language and which do not contain adult(s) fluent in English as a second language;

(2) The State agency shall provide materials used in Program informational activities in the appropriate language(s) as follows:

(i) In project areas with less than 2,000 low-income households, if approximately 100 or more of those households are of a single-language minority;

(ii) In project areas with 2,000 or more low-income households, if approximately 5 percent or more of those households are of a single-language minority; and

(iii) In project areas with a certification office that provides bilingual service as required in paragraph (b)(3) of this section.

(3) The State agency shall provide both certification materials in the appropriate language(s) and bilingual staff or interpreters as follows:

(i) In each individual certification office that provides service to an area containing approximately 100 single-language minority low-income households; and

(ii) In each project area with a total of less than 100 low-income households if a majority of those households are of a single-language minority.

(A) Certification materials shall include the food stamp application form, change report form and notices to households.

(B) If notices are required in only one language other than English, notices may be printed in English on one side and in the other language on the reverse side. If the certification office is required to use several languages, the notice may be printed in English and may contain statements in other languages summarizing the purpose of the notice and the telephone number (toll-free number or a number where collect calls will be accepted for households outside the local calling area) which the household may call to receive additional information. For example, a notice of eligibility could in the appropriate language(s) state:

Your application for food stamps has been approved in the amount stated above. If you need more information telephone _____.

(4) In project areas with a seasonal influx of non-English-speaking households, the State agency shall provide bilingual materials and staff or interpreters, if during the seasonal influx the number of single-language minority low-income households which move into the area meets or exceeds the requirements in paragraphs (b) (2) and (3) of this section.

(5) The State agency shall insure that certification offices subject to the requirements of paragraph (b) (3) or (4)

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of this section provide sufficient bilingual staff or interpreters for the timely processing of non-English-speaking applicants.

(6) The State agency shall develop estimates of the number of low-income single-language minority households, both participating and not participating in the program, for each project area and certification office by using census data (including the Census Bureau's Current Population Report: Population Estimates and Projections, Series P-25, No. 627) and knowledge of project areas and areas serviced by certification offices. Local Bureau of Census offices, Community Services Administration offices, community action agencies, planning agencies, migrant service organizations, and school officials may be important sources of information in determining the need for bilingual service. If these information sources do not provide sufficient information for the State agency to determine if there is a need for bilingual staff or interpreters, each certification office shall, for a 6-month period, record the total number of single-language minority households that visit the office to make inquiries about the program, file a new application for benefits, or be recertified. Those certification offices that are contacted by a total of over 100 single-language minority households in the 6-month period shall be required to provide bilingual staff or interpreters. State agencies shall also combine the figures collected in each certification office to determine the need for bilingual outreach materials in each project area.

(c) *Internal controls—(1) Requirements.* In order to safeguard certification and issuance records from unauthorized creation or tampering, the State agency shall establish an organizational structure which divides the responsibility for eligibility determinations and coupon issuance among certification, data management, and issuance units. The certification unit shall be responsible for the determination of household eligibility and the creation of records and documents to authorize the issuance of coupons to eligible households. The data management unit, in response to input from the certification unit, shall create and main-

tain the household issuance record (HIR) master file on cards, computer discs, tapes, or similar memory devices. The issuance unit shall provide certified households with the authorized allotments. In cases where personnel are periodically, or on a part-time basis, shifted from one unit to another, supervisory controls should be sufficient to assure that the unauthorized creation or modification of case records is not possible.

(2) *Exceptions.* With prior written FNS approval, a project area may combine unit responsibilities if the controls specified in paragraph (c)(1) of this section have been found to be administratively infeasible.

(i) To receive approval of combined operations, the State agency shall establish special review requirements which at a minimum include:

(A) Biweekly reconciliation and verification of transactions; and

(B) Semiannual comparison of HIR cards and case records as required by § 274.6(d) and, at least once every other month, second-party review of certification actions.

(ii) The State agency shall annually determine whether each combined operation continues to be justified and shall so advise FNS in writing.

(d) *Court suit reporting.* (1) State agency responsibility. (i) In the event that a State agency is sued by any person(s) in a State or Federal Court in any matter which involves the State agency's administration of the Food Stamp Program, the State agency shall immediately notify FNS that suit has been brought and shall furnish FNS with copies of the original pleadings. State agencies involved in suits shall, upon request of FNS, take such action as is necessary to join the United States and/or appropriate officials of the Federal Government, such as the Secretary of USDA or the Administrator of FNS, as parties to the suit. FNS may request to join the following types of suits:

(A) Class action suits;

(B) A suit in which an adverse decision could have a national impact;

(C) A suit challenging Federal policy such as a provision of the Act or regulations or an interpretation of the regulations; or,

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(D) A suit based on an empirical situation that is likely to recur.

(ii) FNS may advise a State agency to seek a settlement agreement of a court suit if the State agency is being sued because it misapplied Federal policy in administering the Program.

(iii) State agencies shall notify FNS when court cases have been dismissed or otherwise settled. State agencies shall also provide FNS with information that is requested regarding the State agency's compliance with the requirements of court orders or settlement agreements.

(2) FNS shall notify all State agencies of any suits brought in Federal court that involve FNS' administration of the Program and which have the potential of affecting many State agencies' Program operations. (State agencies need not be notified of suits brought in Federal Court involving FNS' administration of the Program which may only affect Program operations in one or two States.) The notification provided to State agencies shall contain a description of the Federal policy that is involved in the litigation.

(e) *State monitoring of duplicate participation.* (1) Each State agency shall establish a system to assure that no individual participates more than once in a month, in more than one jurisdiction, or in more than one household within the State in the Food Stamp Program. To identify such individuals, the system shall use names and social security numbers at a minimum, and other identifiers such as birth dates or addresses as appropriate.

(i) If the State agency detects a large number of duplicates, it shall implement other measures, such as more frequent checks or increased emphasis on prevention.

(ii) If the State agency provides cash assistance in lieu of coupons for SSI recipients or for households participating in cash-out demonstration projects, the State agency shall check to assure that no individual receives both coupons and other benefits provided in lieu of coupons. Checks to detect individuals receiving both food coupons and cash-out benefits, or any other form of duplicate benefits, shall be made at the time of certification, recertification,

and whenever a new member is added to an existing household. However, if the State agency can show that these time frames are incompatible with its system, the State agency shall check for duplicate benefits when necessary, but no less often than annually.

(2) Processing standards for duplicate participation checks at certification and recertification shall not delay the issuance of benefits.

(i) If the State agency chooses to check at the time of certification and recertification, the check for duplicates shall not delay processing of the application and provision of benefits beyond the normal processing standards in § 273.2(g).

(ii) If a duplicate is found in making such a check, the duplication needs to be resolved in accordance with § 273.2(f)(4)(iv) before the application can be processed and benefits provided. Delays in processing caused by this resolution shall be handled in accordance with § 273.2(h).

(3) State agencies shall develop follow-up procedures and corrective action requirements, including time frames within which action must be taken, to be applied to data obtained from matching for duplicate participation. Follow-up actions shall include, but not be limited to, the adjustment of benefits and eligibility, filing of claims, disqualification hearings, and referrals for prosecution, as appropriate.

(4) FNS reserves the right to review State agencies' use of data obtained from matching for duplicate participation and may require State agencies to take additional specific action to ensure that such data is being used to protect Program integrity.

(f) *Hours of operation.* State agencies are responsible for setting the hours of operation for their food stamp offices. In doing so, State agencies must take into account the special needs of the populations they serve including households containing a working person.

(g) *Fraud detection units.* State agencies shall establish and operate fraud detection units in all project areas in

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which 5,000 or more households participate in the Program. The fraud detection unit shall be responsible for detecting, investigating and assisting in the prosecution of Program fraud and need not be physically located in each 5,000 household “catchment area”. The workers fulfilling this function need not work full-time in fraud detection nor work exclusively on the Program. A written State agency procedure which systematically identifies and refers potential fraud cases to Investigators shall be considered a “detection” activity meeting the requirements of this section. The fraud detection function may be performed by persons not employed by the State agency.

[Amdt. 132, 43 FR 47884, Oct. 17, 1978, as amended by Amdt. 221, 47 FR 35168, Aug. 13, 1982; Amdt. 211, 47 FR 53315, Nov. 26, 1982; Amdt. 237, 47 FR 57668, 57669, Dec. 28, 1982; Amdt. 262, 49 FR 50597, Dec. 31, 1984; 54 FR 7003, Feb. 15, 1989; 54 FR 24527, June 7, 1989; Amdt. 320, 55 FR 6238, Feb. 22, 1990; Amdt. 371, 61 FR 60010, Nov. 26, 1996; Amdt. 388, 65 FR 70192, Nov. 21, 2000]

§ 272.5 Program informational activities.

(a) *Definition.* “Program informational activities” are those activities that convey information about the Program, including household rights and responsibilities, through means such as publications, telephone hotlines, and face-to-face contacts.

(b) *Minimum requirements.* State agencies shall comply with the following minimum information requirements for applicants and recipients.

(1) *Nutrition information.* FNS must encourage State agencies to develop Nutrition Education Plans as specified at § 272.2(d)(2) to inform applicant and participant households about the importance of a nutritious diet and the relationship between diet and health.

(2) State agencies shall encourage program participants to participate in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and, wherever practicable, allow EFNEP personnel to come into food stamp offices to distribute informational materials and speak with food stamp recipients.

(3) *Rights and responsibilities.* State agencies shall inform participant and applicant households of their Program rights and responsibilities. This infor-

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mation may be provided through whatever means the State agencies deem appropriate.

(4) All Program informational material shall be available in languages other than English as required in § 272.4(b) and shall include a statement that the Program is available to all without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap, religious creed, national origin or political belief.

(c) *Program informational activities for low-income households.* At their option State agencies may carry out and claim associated costs for Program informational activities designed to inform low-income households about the availability, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and benefits of the Food Stamp Program. Program informational materials used in such activities shall be subject to § 272.4(b), which pertains to bilingual requirements. Before FNS considers costs for such activities eligible for reimbursement at the fifty percent rate under part 277, State agencies shall obtain FNS approval for the attachment to their Plans of Operation as specified in § 272.2(d)(1)(ix). In such attachments, State agencies shall describe the subject activities with respect to the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the target population, types of media used, geographic areas warranting attention, and outside organizations which would be involved. State agencies shall update this attachment to their Plans of Operation when significant changes occur and report projected costs for this Program activity in accordance with § 272.2 (c), (e), and (f).

[Amdt. 207, 47 FR 52334, Nov. 19, 1982. Redesignated by Amdt. 211, 47 FR 53316, Nov. 26, 1982; Amdt. 262, 49 FR 50597, Dec. 31, 1984; 52 FR 36398, Sept. 29, 1987; 54 FR 24527, June 7, 1989; Amdt. 320, 55 FR 6239, Feb. 22, 1990]

§ 272.6 Nondiscrimination compliance.

(a) *Requirement.* State agencies shall not discriminate against any applicant or participant in any aspect of program administration, including, but not limited to, the certification of households, the issuance of coupons, the conduct of fair hearings, or the conduct of any other program service for reasons of