

respect to the unauthorized, willful disclosure to any person of SSNs and related records obtained or maintained in the same manner and to the same extent as sections 7213(a) (1), (2) and (3) apply with respect to unauthorized disclosures of returns and return information described in those sections. The sanction under section 7213(a)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 will apply with respect to the willful offer of any item of material value in exchange for any SSN or related record in the same manner and to the same extent as section 7213(a)(4) applies with respect to offers (in exchange for any return or return information) described in that section.

(4) *FNS initiated matches.* Under the restrictions noted in paragraph (r) of this section, FNS will periodically initiate cross matches of retailer data with other Federal and State agencies' files for the purpose of verifying information provided by applicant and participating firms, and for the purposes of administering and enforcing other Federal or State laws. Such matches could involve all firms participating after implementation for the purpose of verifying information such as, but not limited to, SSNs and retail sales data.

(r) *Public and Private Nonprofit Homeless Meal Providers.* FNS shall authorize as retail food stores, those public and private nonprofit homeless meal providers which apply and qualify for authorization to accept food stamps from homeless food stamp recipients. Such meal providers must be public or private nonprofit organizations as defined by the Internal Revenue Service (I.R.C. 501(c)(3)), must serve meals that include food purchased by the provider, must meet the requirements of paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section, and must be approved by an appropriate State or local agency, pursuant to § 272.9. Public and private nonprofit homeless meal providers shall be responsible for obtaining approval from an appropriate State or local agency and shall provide written documentation of such approval to FNS prior to approval of the meal provider's application for authorization. (If such approval is subsequently withdrawn, FNS authorization shall be withdrawn).

Public and private nonprofit homeless meal providers serving meals which consist wholly of donated foods shall not be eligible for authorization. In an area in which FNS, in consultation with the Department's Office of Inspector General, finds evidence that the authorization of a public and private nonprofit homeless meal provider would damage the Food Stamp Program's integrity, FNS shall limit the participation of that public and private nonprofit homeless meal provider, unless FNS determines that the establishment or shelter is the only one of its kind serving the area.

(s) Each authorized retail food store shall post in a suitable and conspicuous location in the store a sign designed and provided by FNS which provides information on how persons may report abuses they have observed in the operation of the program. Refusal or repeated failure to display such a sign by an authorized retail food store may result in the withdrawal of the firm's approval to participate in the program.

(t) *Periodic notification.* The FNS will issue periodic notification to participating retail stores and wholesale food concerns to clarify program eligibility criteria, including the definitions of "Retail food store", "Staple foods", "Eligible foods", and "Perishable foods". At a minimum, such information will be provided to stores at the time of authorization, reauthorization and upon request.

[Amdt. 136, 43 FR 43274, Sept. 22, 1978]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting § 278.1, see the List of CFR Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and on GPO Access.

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: At 61 FR 53600, Oct. 15, 1996, in § 278.1, paragraph (i) was redesignated as paragraph (j) and a new paragraph (i) was added. This paragraph contains information collection and recordkeeping requirements and will not become effective until approval has been given by the Office of Management and Budget. The Food and Nutrition Service will publish a document in the FEDERAL REGISTER announcing the effective date.

§ 278.2 Participation of retail food stores.

(a) *Use of coupons.* Coupons may be accepted by an authorized retail food

store only from eligible households or the households' authorized representative, and only in exchange for eligible food. Coupons may not be accepted in exchange for cash, except when cash is returned as change in a transaction in which coupons were accepted in payment for eligible food under paragraph (d) of this section. Coupons may not be accepted in payment of interest on loans or for any other nonfood use. An authorized retail food store may not accept coupons from another retail food store, except that public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers may redeem coupons for eligible food through authorized retail food stores.

(b) *Equal treatment for coupon customers.* Coupons shall be accepted for eligible foods at the same prices and on the same terms and conditions applicable to cash purchases of the same foods at the same store except that tax shall not be charged on eligible foods purchased with coupons. However, nothing in this part may be construed as authorizing FNS to specify the prices at which retail food stores may sell food. However, public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers may only request *voluntary* use of food stamps from homeless food stamp recipients and may not request such household using food stamps to pay more than the average cost of the food *purchased* by the public or private nonprofit homeless meal provider contained in a meal served to the patrons of the meal service. For purposes of this section, "average cost" is determined by averaging food costs over a period of up to one calendar month. Voluntary payments by food stamp recipients in excess of such costs may be accepted by the meal providers. The value of donated foods from any source shall not be considered in determining the amount to be requested from food stamp recipients. All indirect costs, such as those incurred in the acquisition, storage, or preparation of the foods used in meals shall also be excluded. In addition, if others have the option of eating free or making a monetary donation, food stamp recipients must be provided the same option of eating free or making a donation in money or food stamps. No retail food store may single out coupon users for special treatment in any way.

(c) *Accepting coupons.* No authorized retail food store may accept coupons marked "paid," "canceled," or "specimen." Nor may a retail food store accept coupons bearing any cancellation or endorsement, or coupons of other than the 1-dollar denomination which have been detached from the coupon books prior to the time of purchase or delivery of eligible food unless the detached coupons are accompanied by the coupon books which bear the same serial numbers that appear on the detached coupons. However, in the case of public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers, retail food stores may accept detached coupons which have been accepted by the homeless meal provider. It is the right of the household member or the authorized representative to detach the coupons from the book.

(d) *Making change.* An authorized retail food store shall use, for the purpose of making change, uncanceled and unmarked 1-dollar coupons which were previously accepted for eligible foods. If change in an amount of less than 1-dollar is required, the eligible household shall receive the change in cash. However, in the case of public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers, neither cash change nor credit slips shall be provided under any circumstances when food stamps are used to purchase meals. At no time may cash change in excess of 99 cents be returned in a coupon transaction. An authorized retail food store may not engage in a series of coupon transactions the purpose of which is to provide the same food stamp customer an amount of cash change greater than the maximum 99 cents cash change allowed in one transaction.

(e) *Accepting coupons before delivery.* Food retailers may not accept coupons before delivering the food, retain custody of any unspent coupons, or in any way prevent an eligible household from using coupons in making purchases from other authorized firms. However, a nonprofit cooperative food purchasing venture may accept coupons from a member of the cooperative at the time the member places a food order. The food ordered must be made available to the member within 14 days

from the day the cooperative receives the member's coupons.

(f) *Paying credit accounts.* Coupons may not be accepted by an authorized retail food store in payment for any eligible food sold to a household on credit.

(g) *Redeeming coupons.* Authorized retail food stores may exchange coupons accepted in accordance with this part for face value upon presentation through the banking system or through a wholesale food concern authorized to accept coupons from that retailer. Authorized drug addict or alcoholic treatment and rehabilitation programs, group living arrangements, and shelters for battered women and children may present coupons for redemption through authorized wholesale food concerns. A drug addict or alcoholic treatment center, group living arrangement, or shelter for battered women and children may purchase food in authorized retail food stores as the authorized representative of its participating households. Public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers may purchase food in authorized retail food stores and through authorized wholesale food concerns. Authorized drug addict and alcoholic treatment and rehabilitation programs, group living arrangements, shelters for battered women and children, and public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers for homeless food stamp households shall not present coupons directly to an insured financial institution for redemption.

(h) *Identifying coupon users.* Coupons may not knowingly be accepted from persons who have no right to possession of coupons. If a food retailer has any cause to believe that a person presenting coupons has no right to use the coupons, the food retailer should request the person to show the ID card of the household to establish the right of that person to use the coupons. Where photo ID cards are in use, the person presenting the ID card need not be pictured on the card. Public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers redeeming detached coupons through retail food stores shall present their retailer authorization card as proof of their eligibility to redeem coupons through retail food stores.

(i) *Checking meal delivery service recipients.* A nonprofit meal delivery service shall require the recipient of a delivered meal to show the marked ID card establishing the recipient's right to use coupons for that service the first time that the recipient offers coupons in payment for the service, and shall request the marked ID card at any time the nonprofit meal delivery service has cause to question the continued eligibility of the recipient to use coupons for delivered meals.

(j) *Checking hunting and fishing equipment users.* Authorized Alaskan retailers shall require coupon customers wanting to purchase hunting and fishing equipment with coupons to show their ID cards to determine that they live in an area designated by FNS as one in which persons are dependent upon hunting and fishing for subsistence.

(k) *Checking participants in restaurants.* A restaurant operating under a State contract shall require a household purchasing meals to show the marked ID card establishing the household's right to purchase meals with coupons unless the personnel of the restaurant know that the program participant tendering coupons is eligible to use coupons to purchase meals.

(l) *Checking public or private nonprofit homeless meal provider recipients.* Public or private nonprofit homeless meal providers shall establish a food stamp patron's right to purchase meals with coupons.

[Amdt. 136, 43 FR 43274, Sept. 22, 1978, as amended at Amdt. 191, 46 FR 50277, Oct. 9, 1981; Amdt. 205, 46 FR 60167, Dec. 8, 1981; Amdt. 257, 49 FR 32538, Aug. 15, 1984; Amdt. 286, 52 FR 7557, Mar. 11, 1987; 53 FR 31649, Aug. 19, 1988; Amdt. 344, 56 FR 54778, Oct. 23, 1991; Amdt. 356, 59 FR 29714, June 9, 1994; Amdt. 343, 61 FR 53601, Oct. 15, 1996]

§ 278.3 Participation of wholesale food concerns.

(a) *Accepting coupons.* An authorized wholesale food concern may accept endorsed coupons from one or more specified authorized retail food stores, from one or more specified authorized nonprofit cooperative food-purchasing ventures, from one or more specified authorized group living arrangements, from one or more specified authorized