Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Commodity Foods

For Native people, it is important to consider the benefits and drawbacks as well as your unique circumstances when selecting either the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), more commonly known as the commodity food program, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), both managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is not possible for households to participate in SNAP and FDPIR in the same month.

Understanding how each program works is critical when making choices about which program to utilize, how these programs can impact your family’s health and ways that activities such as planting gardens can complement these programs to provide better nutrition for your family. Tribes are also expanding their own programs to increase positive nutrition education and encourage healthy activities.

While tribes and others continue to advocate for increased funding for federal programs and the development of policies to meet the nutritional needs of our communities, Native people are also developing their own solutions that ensure more positive health outcomes for their families and communities. Specifically, there is a major shift occurring in Indian Country as Native people are producing their own traditional foods on their own lands to sustain themselves, their families and their communities. This movement can supplement the benefits received by participants in both SNAP and FDPIR, although continued advocacy for increased funding is critical. This movement to improve health will contribute to having a sustainable source of produce and other healthy foods that are safe and nutritious, leading to more balanced diets and healthier Native communities in the future.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

What is it and how does it work?

✦ SNAP is a current government program managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to offer assistance to low-income individuals and families. As an enrolled participant of the SNAP program you will be able to receive assistance from the USDA and will be issued an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to use for purchases.

✦ There is flexibility in choosing the best nutrition options for yourself and family as long as you follow certain guidelines in using your EBT card. For a list of options available, visit your nutrition provider or search the USDA’s website at http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap.

✦ SNAP program participants must use an authorized retailer to utilize their EBT cards. A listing of all registered retailers is available online at www.snapretailerlocator.com.

✦ To learn about SNAP eligibility requirements, visit: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/eligibility.htm.
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Did you know?

✦ Nearly 55 percent of SNAP participants are children or elderly. About 41 percent live in households with some level of income, according to a USDA study.

✦ According to the National Congress of American Indians, 20 percent of all American Indian and Alaskan Native families receive SNAP benefits.¹

What to consider when choosing SNAP

✦ Limitations in the SNAP program include lack of access to SNAP offices and/or authorized retailers on or near reservations, as well as travel expenses to grocery stores off reservation.

✦ In order to have a healthy diet, SNAP participants must have a plan in place to budget the types of foods to reach the recommended nutrient levels for optimal health.

✦ More Farmers Markets are becoming authorized to accept SNAP benefits. Specifically, Between FY 2006 and FY 2010 there was a 263 percent increase in the number of authorized farmers markets and a 49 percent increase in SNAP redemptions at farmers markets, according to the USDA.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

What is it and how does it work?

✦ FDPIR program is a nutrition-assistance program that is distributed to low-income families as an alternative to the SNAP because of the lack of easy access to SNAP offices or authorized retailers on or near reservations.²

✦ FDPIR is the also know as the “commodity” food program and sends a monthly package of over 70 different food products to enrolled households.

✦ This program is administered at the local level by either state or approved Indian Tribal Organizations. If you are interested in this program and would like to look up the details, you can visit the FDPIR website at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpir/.

✦ The USDA purchases and ships FDPIR foods to the ITOs and State agencies based on their orders from a list of available foods. Participants on most reservations can choose fresh produce instead of canned fruits and vegetables, according to the USDA.

¹ McGhee, R., Board Member, National Indian Child Welfare Association and D. Gipp, United Tribes Technical College; Support for Direct Tribal Administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/Food Stamps); National Congress of American Indians; REN-13-039; Mid 2013 Conference Reno, NV.

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✦ According to the USDA, eligibility includes low-income American Indian and non-Indian households that reside on a reservation, and households living in approved areas near a reservation or in Oklahoma that contain at least one person who is a member of a federally-recognized tribe. To apply, contact your SDA/Indian Tribal Organization, or the FDPIR regional office in your area. For a list of the FDPIR contacts that administer this program, visit http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/fnsro-contacts.htm.

What to consider when choosing FDPIR and other facts

✦ The FDPIR program allows participants to choose from a limited selection of 70 different food products. To view 2014 FDPIR products, visit: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdpir/food-distribution-program-indian-reservations-fdpir.

✦ Contact you administering agency to learn more about their offerings such as nutrition counseling, cooking demonstrations, nutrition classes, and the printed nutritional information. For contacts, visit http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/fdpir-contacts.htm.

✦ Fresh vegetables and fruits are available on many reservations instead of canned fruits and vegetables as part of FDPIR, but not all programs have them available.

Moving toward healthier diets

SNAP and FDPIR are not designed to meet the complete nutritional needs of participants. If you are utilizing SNAP or FDPIR, consider the following while using the programs:

✦ Use SNAP benefits to purchase seeds and plant a garden in the coming year to supplement your diet with healthy fruits and vegetables;

✦ You can access the nutrition information and learn about recipes for all FDPIR food products at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpir/cfs_fdpir.htm.

✦ Make an appointment with a healthcare provider to discuss how you can ensure your family is meeting all the nutritional requirements for optimum health; and

✦ USDA has a series of programs titled SNAP-Ed to help participants learn more about the options in choosing the best source of nutrition. It can be found online at www.fns.usda.gov/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-education-snap-ed or at your local nutritionist’s office.
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For healthy recipes, visit:

✦ The Chickasaw Nation in partnership with the USDA has designed a program titled Get Fresh! that includes recipes [http://getfreshcooking.com/](http://getfreshcooking.com/)

✦ Programs that provide information and suggested recipes [www.fns.usda.gov/fnfs-recipe-box](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fnfs-recipe-box).

✦ Recipes from Indian Country Today utilizing traditional Native foods [http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/department/native-recipes](http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/department/native-recipes)

✦ American Indian Health and Diet Project - healthy traditional recipes [www.aihd.ku.edu/recipes/index.html](http://www.aihd.ku.edu/recipes/index.html).

✦ Learn more about 17 programs that are striving to restore local, traditional foods, through the Center for Disease Control’s Traditional Foods Project [www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/ndwp/traditional-foods.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/ndwp/traditional-foods.htm).