

NEBRASKA

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Pete Ricketts, Governor

December 1, 2017

Patrick O'Donnell
State Capitol, Room 2018
P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Mr. O'Donnell,

Nebraska Revised Statute 68-1017.02 requires the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to report annually to the Legislature by December 1, regarding the status of the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) in Nebraska. The report is required to include information about federal options provided to the State with a description of any actions taken by the DHHS regarding these options, including the number of persons being served through these options.

The report is attached and also includes the most recent United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, State Options Report, SNAP (Thirteenth Edition, October 1, 2016).

If you have any questions, please contact me at 402-471-1878.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew T. Wallen".

Matthew T. Wallen, Director
Division of Children and Family Services
Department of Health and Human Services

NEBRASKA STATE OPTIONS REPORT FOR LB171

NOVEMBER 2017

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) statutes, regulations and waivers provide Nebraska (NE) with numerous policy options. The NE Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) uses options to remove or reduce barriers to access and participation in the SNAP.

The current State Options Report by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Thirteenth Edition, was published in October 2016. See attachment.

Changes made to State SNAP Programs since October 2016, are not reflected in this report. Any changes will be reflected in a future edition of the State Options Report.

The chart on the following pages summarizes the FNS State Options report and compares options taken by the 50 states and three territories operating the SNAP.

Please note that Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is also known as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC).

Further explanation follows the chart.

State Options	Does Nebraska Utilize the Option	All States/Territories
County or State Administration	NE is state-administered	State-administered – 43 County-administered - 10
1. Reporting Requirements	Yes Simplified. All SNAP cases are Simplified or Transitional as of 4/11/2016	Simplified Reporting Only – 25 Simplified & Change Reporting - 25 Monthly, Simplified & Change Reporting – 2 Change Reporting Only - 1
2. Simplified Reporting – Action on Changes	Yes Act on All Changes	Act on all changes -34 Act only on certain changes – 18 No Simplified Reporting - 1
3. Simplified Reporting – Certification Length	Yes 6 and 12 months certifications effective 4/11/2016	4 & 12 Months – 1 4, 6, & 12 Months – 2 4, 12, & 24 Months – 1 4, 5, 6, & 12 Months – 1 4, 6, 12, & 24 Months - 3 6 Month Certification periods – 7 6 & 12 Months – 6 6 & 24 Months – 2 6, 12, & 24 Months – 4 12 Month Certification periods – 15 12 & 24 Months – 10 Change Reporting Only - 1
4. Simplified Income and Resources	Yes Income and Resources	Income and Resources - 17 Income only - 8 Resources only – 8 Neither -20
5. Simplified Self-Employment (SE) Determination	Yes Flat percentage	Simplified SE Determination (Flat Percentage) – 19 Another Method –3 No Method - 31
6. Simplified Homeless Housing Cost	Yes	Simplified Homeless Housing Cost – 29 No Simplified Homeless Housing Cost - 24
7. Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs)	Yes Mandatory SUA	Mandatory SUA – 48 Non Mandatory SUA - 5
8. Ineligible Noncitizens – Treatment of Income & Deductions	Yes Prorate for both categories	Count all but a prorated share – 52 Count none - 1
9. Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	No	Legally obligated child support expense income exclusion - 20 No child support income expense exclusion - 33
10. Child Support Related Disqualifications	No	Arrears and Failure To Cooperate – 1 Failure to Cooperate – 5 Neither - 47
11. Comparable Disqualifications	Yes	Comparable Disqualification – 24 No Comparable Disqualification - 29
12. Drug Felony Disqualifications	Yes Modified Ban	Lifetime Ban – 7 Modified Ban – 24 No Ban - 22
13. Work Requirements and Disqualification (DQ) Policy	Yes Entire HH (if Head of	Extended DQ only – 17 Entire Household (HH) DQ – 7

	Household)	Extended DQ and Entire HH DQ - 4 Extended DQ, entire HH, Permanent DQ – 1 Regulatory Minimum - 24
14. Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) Note: LB 543 established BBCE as of 10/1/2011	Yes	BBCE – 42 No BBCE - 11
15. Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA)	Yes	Transition Benefits - 22 No Transitional Benefits - 31
16. Document Imaging/Electronic Case Files	Yes Completely electronic files statewide	Statewide – 32 Partially electronic statewide – 11 Completely electronic in specific areas - 4 Partially electronic in specific areas - 3 None - 3
17. Demonstrations for the Elderly and Disabled	No	Elderly Simplified Application (ESAP) - 5 Standard Medical Deduction (SMD) - 16 ESAP and SMD - 3
18. Combined Application Project (CAP)	No	Standard CAP – 7 Modified CAP – 10 No CAP - 36
19. Online Applications	Yes Apply and Recertify	None – 8 Apply only – 11 Recertify only - 1 Apply and recertify - 33
20. Online Case Management	Yes View, Report and Upload	No online management – 15 View case only - 2 View and report – 5 View and upload - 3 View, report and upload – 22 Report only – 3 Report and upload – 1 Upload only – 2
21. Call Centers	Yes Statewide	One statewide call center – 16 Multiple call centers – specific function – entire state - 14 Multiple call centers – specific areas – 8 No call center - 15
22. Mobile Technology	Yes Currently in the process of procuring a contractor for text messaging	Messaging only – 7 Mobile app only - 6 Messaging and developing mobile application – 1 Developing mobile app - 1 Messaging and mobile application – 3 No mobile technology - 35

FURTHER EXPLANATION ON STATE OPTIONS

States have flexibility to adapt their organizational structure to administer SNAP, which allows the states to serve the unique needs of their populations. States may opt to centralize or to decentralize their administrative responsibilities for SNAP. In their State Plan of Operations, states provide a description of their organizational structure, including whether the program is state, county, locally, or regionally administered. Nebraska is state-administered.

1. Reporting Requirements

State agencies have the option of requiring SNAP recipients to report household circumstances at various intervals and in various ways. State agencies can use different reporting systems for different types of households, or different geographical areas, but each household is subject to only one reporting system. Recipients may be required to report changes periodically or within a certain time, typically within 10 days, after certain changes in circumstances occur (known as Change Reporting). Under Periodic Reporting, participants report either monthly, quarterly, or using a simplified system with reduced reporting requirements. Under the Simplified Reporting option, households are required to report changes in income between certification and scheduled reporting periods when total countable income rises above 130 percent of the poverty level or when work hours for able-bodied adults without dependents fall below 20 hours per week.

Simplified Reporting does not expand initial or continuing SNAP eligibility but may prevent a decrease in a household's monthly allotment during their certification period. If total household income exceeds 130% of the federal poverty level, the SNAP case is closed.

As of October 31, 2017, there are currently 78,009 SNAP households in NE. Of these, 76,698 households are assigned to Simplified Reporting and 1,311 are assigned to Transitional Benefits.

Nebraska currently utilizes the option to assign all SNAP cases to Simplified Reporting or to Transitional Benefits.

2. Simplified Reporting – Action on Changes

Under simplified reporting, state agencies have the option to act on all changes reported during the certification period, or to act only on certain changes that result in an increase in household benefits. States which have chosen to act on all changes must act to verify any changes reported and take appropriate action, even if this change reduces the client's benefit. This option allows states that have combined SNAP/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs to more seamlessly integrate. It avoids a situation where the TANF program has acted on a change, but SNAP has not, and decreases caseworker burden by aligning the programs.

If information is known to the agency, NE acts on all information. As clients are required to report changes for other economic assistance programs, the change is made for SNAP also. If a client reports a decrease in income during their certification period, their SNAP benefits may increase.

This option does not expand initial or continuing SNAP eligibility but may prevent a decrease in a household's monthly allotment during their certification period.

Nebraska acts on all changes.

3. Simplified Reporting- Certification Length

Households certified for SNAP for longer than 6 months must submit a periodic report at least once every 6 months, but no more than once every 4 months during the certification period. Some state agencies have opted to certify Simplified Reporting households for 12 months, with a periodic report at 6 months. Others have opted to certify households for 6 months. Households in which all members are elderly or disabled with no earned income may be given 12 month certification periods without periodic reporting, or 24 month certification periods with a 12 month periodic reporting requirement.

This option does not expand initial or continuing eligibility for SNAP.

As of October 31, 2017, there are 76,698 SNAP households currently assigned to Simplified Reporting.

Nebraska certifies Simplified Reporting households for 6 months. Effective April 11, 2016, if households contain all adult members who are elderly or disabled with no earned income, they are certified for 12 months.

4. Simplified Income and Resources

State agencies have the option to exclude some types of income and resources by aligning SNAP policy with the TANF or Medicaid policy. Income not counted under TANF or Section 1931 of the Social Security Act, which authorized Medicaid, can be excluded with some exceptions. The exceptions include wages, salaries, self-employment income, benefits from major assistance programs, regular payments from a government source, worker's compensation, child support payments, and other types of income determined countable to ensure fairness in eligibility determinations. The same option exists for the treatment of resources. A number of resources cannot be excluded when using this option, including cash, licensed vehicles, and readily available amounts in financial institutions.

Nebraska currently utilizes the option of excluding educational income as income and resources to align with TANF. We will continue to explore other simplified definitions of income and resources.

5. Simplified Self-Employment Determination

States have the option to adopt a simplified method for determining the cost of doing business in cases where an applicant is self-employed. Should a state decide to adopt a simplified method, the state agency has flexibility to develop a method to calculate this cost – a flat percentage, a figure based on average costs, or some other method. Some states use different figures/methods for different types of self-employment. At present, 22 states have adopted a simplified method for determining the costs of doing business for self-employed applicant income. Of these, 19 use a flat percentage of gross income applied to all types of self-employment.

This option will not expand initial or continuing SNAP eligibility but could increase some clients' benefits and decrease other clients' benefits.

Nebraska currently utilizes a flat percentage of gross income for self-employment deductions.

6. Simplified Homeless Housing Cost

States have the option to use a standard deduction from income of \$143 per month for homeless households with some shelter expenses. This option streamlines the process for states and applicants who are homeless, as they are not requested to itemize specific costs. However, homeless households may claim actual expenses if they are higher and verified.

This does not expand initial SNAP eligibility but may increase a household's monthly allotment.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

7. Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs)

State agencies electing to use SUAs for all households in place of actual utility costs can opt to make their SUA mandatory. By taking this option, the state opts out of the requirement to prorate SUAs for households that share living space. In addition, this option requires that states use an SUA that includes the heating and cooling costs of public housing residents with shared meters that are charged only for excess utility costs.

This option does not expand initial or continuing SNAP eligibility but may increase a household's monthly allotment.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

8. Treatment of Income and Deductions of Ineligible Non-Citizens

Although ineligible non-citizens cannot receive SNAP benefits, their income is relevant to the benefit determinations of other eligible household members. If the non-citizen

would have been considered ineligible for SNAP prior to Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), state agencies have the option to either count all, or a prorated share, of that individual's income and deductions when determining the benefit level of the other household members (referred to as category 1 for the purposes of this report). However, if a non-citizen is ineligible for SNAP because of PRWORA, state agencies may either count none, or a pro-rated share, of the individual's income and deductions (referred to as category 2 for the purposes of this report). When a state has chosen a given option, it must be implemented statewide, and only applies to the income of the ineligible non-citizen, not to other eligible household members.

Nebraska utilizes the option of prorating a share for each category.

9. Child Support Expense Exclusion

States have the option to treat legally obligated child support payments made to non-household members as an income exclusion rather than as a deduction. This option helps to encourage payment of child support by excluding the amount paid from being considered part of the payer's gross income. States that do not use this option treat legally obligated child support payments made to non-household members as a deduction. States not opting for the income exclusion deduct legally obligated child support payments made per 7 CFR 273.9(d)(5) and 273.9(c)(17). This option would expand SNAP eligibility.

Nebraska does not currently utilize this option, thus it treats child support payments as a deduction, not an income exclusion.

10. Child Support Related Disqualifications

States have the option to disqualify individuals who fail to cooperate with child support enforcement agencies, who are in arrears in court-ordered child support payments, or both.

This option will not expand initial SNAP eligibility nor will it increase SNAP monthly benefits.

Nebraska does not currently utilize this option.

11. Comparable Disqualification

State agencies may disqualify SNAP applicants or recipients who fail to perform actions required by other federal, state, or local means tested public assistance programs. A state agency has the option to select the types of disqualifications within a program that it wants to impose on SNAP recipients. Only the individual who committed the violation may be disqualified from SNAP, even if the entire household was disqualified under the rules of the other means-tested program.

This option does not expand initial SNAP eligibility nor will it increase monthly allotments.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

12. Drug Felony Disqualifications

Welfare reform legislation permanently disqualifies people from SNAP participation if they have committed and been convicted of a state or federal felony offense, which occurred after August 22, 1996, involving the possession, use or distribution of a controlled substance. State legislatures can opt out of the penalty entirely or choose to impose less severe restrictions through a modified ban. Examples of these modified approaches are 1) limiting the circumstances in which the permanent disqualification applies (such as only when convictions involve the sale of drugs); 2) requiring the person convicted to submit to drug testing; 3) requiring participation in a drug treatment program; and/or 4) imposing a temporary disqualification period. Additional information on modified bans is available in the SNAP State Agency Profiles.

Nebraska opted for and currently utilizes a modified approach limiting the circumstances in which the permanent disqualification applies.

This option reduces SNAP eligibility.

13. Work Requirements and Disqualification Policy

SNAP regulations require all non-exempt household members to comply with work requirements, such as registering for work, participating in Employment and Training (E&T) or workfare program if assigned, and not voluntarily quitting a job or reducing hours. Individuals who fail to comply without good cause are ineligible for benefits and disqualified from SNAP for certain periods of time. The minimum periods set by law are 1 month for the first instance, 3 months for the second, and 6 months for the third. The law gives states the options to 1) establish disqualification (DQ) periods longer than the minimums, 2) make the DQ permanent upon the third occurrence, and 3) sanction the entire household if the head of household fails to comply.

Nebraska applies minimum periods set by law and disqualifies the entire household whenever the head of household fails to comply with work requirements other than the E&T program. Nebraska operates a voluntary E&T program.

14. Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE)

By law, households that receive cash benefits from another means-tested program like Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI), TANF, or General Assistance are categorically eligible for SNAP. States have the option of adopting a policy referred to as BBCE, which expands SNAP categorical eligibility to households that receive non-cash benefits that are funded by TANF or Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds. Under BBCE, a state aligns its asset and income limits with the TANF non-cash benefit program that confers categorical eligibility. While certain eligibility criteria are deemed for BBCE households, as they are for other categorically eligible households, these households must provide documentation of income and certain expenses in order for benefits to be calculated. BBCE households must also meet all other SNAP rules and have net incomes low enough to qualify for a SNAP benefit.

Nebraska expanded categorical eligibility by broad-based eligibility requirements through the Expanded Resource Program. Only liquid resources that exceed \$25,000 count when determining eligibility. Non-liquid resources are excluded.

This may increase initial SNAP eligibility but does not increase a household's monthly allotment. This option expands SNAP eligibility.

NE currently utilizes this option.

15. Transitional Benefits

State agencies have the option to offer transitional SNAP benefits to families leaving the TANF or state-funded cash assistance programs. Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA) ensure that such households can continue to meet their nutritional needs as they make the transition from welfare to work. They provide a family a set benefit amount and eliminate reporting requirements during the transition period. Benefits can be continued for up to 5 months at a level equal to the amount the household received prior to TANF termination, with adjustments for the loss of TANF income. Certification periods may be extended so that families receive the full 5 months of benefits. State agencies may choose to exclude households where all members are ineligible to receive SNAP benefits because they fail to comply with laws related to a means-tested program; fail to cooperate with child support agencies; or are delinquent in court-ordered child support.

This does not expand initial SNAP eligibility but may increase a household's monthly allotment and extend their certification period.

As of October 31, 2017, there are 1,311 SNAP households enrolled in the Transitional Benefit Option.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

16. Document Imaging

Document imaging is the process of scanning paper documents and converting them to digital images that are then stored in an electronic format. This technology allows state agencies to create paperless or less paper intensive certification systems, cutting the expenses and space requirements associated with the storage and maintenance of this documentation, and increasing the efficiency of the certification process.

This technology may be used to scan permanent verification documents (such as birth certificates or alien registration), temporary verification (such as wage stubs, rent receipts, or bank statements), or entire case records (including signed applications, periodic reports, or change reports).

In Nebraska the Division of Children and Family Services, Economic Assistance programs, has one Document Imaging Center, located in Omaha, NE, that accepts applications, forms and verifications from customers.

This option does not expand initial eligibility for SNAP eligibility.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

17. Demonstrations for the Elderly and Disabled.

The Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) and the Standard Medical Deduction (SMD) are two demonstration projects that target the elderly (aged 60 years and over) and disabled low-income populations. The ESAP streamlines the application and certification process by waiving the recertification interview, utilizing data matches, and extending certification periods to 36 months. ESAPs serve elderly households with no earned income, and in some cases also include disabled households with no earned income.

SNAP households with elderly or disabled members are entitled to a deduction from their household income of allowable, out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by these members that are in excess of \$35/month. State agencies may request a demonstration waiver to establish a SMD for these households in lieu of calculating actual expenses however households still retain the option to claim actual medical expenses if they are higher than the SMD threshold. The SMD allows states to streamline administrative procedures and reduce the paperwork burden on seniors and disabled persons. The SMD simplifies the process of claiming this deduction for vulnerable households.

Nebraska is not utilizing this option.

18. Combined Application Project (CAP)

Combined Application Project (CAP) is a partnership between the Social Security Administration (SSA), FNS, and state and local agencies to streamline application procedures for individuals receiving SSI benefits. The projects are designed to strengthen access to nutrition benefits for this vulnerable population by streamlining the SNAP application process. There are two models for CAPs: standard and modified. A standard model includes simplified joint SNAP/SSI application processing by SSA as individuals apply for or are recertified for SSI. A modified model utilizes data from SSA for targeted SNAP outreach to eligible SSI households who are then sent applications. Both models rely on standardized benefits and shelter amounts and require evaluations to ensure cost neutrality is maintained. The existing CAP states are being provided for informational purposes; FNS and SSA are not soliciting proposals for new demonstrations of this type.

Nebraska is not utilizing this option.

19. Online Applications

SNAP online applications can increase program access by providing more flexibility for households interested in applying for SNAP and renewing their benefits. There are 45 state agencies that provide SNAP applicants with the opportunity to apply for benefits online, while 33 state agencies allow SNAP participants to recertify or renew their benefits online.

Nebraska allows SNAP recipients to apply and recertify for benefits online.

The DHHS received 17,913 *total* (electronic, phone and paper) applications for all programs in September 2017.

Of the total applications received in October 2017:

- 6,286 were electronic applications. Of the electronic applications, 2,137 were received during non-work hours (34%).
- 4,555 were phone applications.

The total number of *electronic* applications for all programs submitted from October 1, 2016, through September 30, 2017, was 79,268. Of the electronic applications, 23,780 were received during non-work hours (30%).

This option does not expand initial eligibility for SNAP.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

20. Online Case Management

Online case management can provide support to the certification process in local offices by reducing the time case workers spend answering phone calls concerning application and benefit status information, and processing changes. Thirty-eight state websites allow clients to perform some case management tasks online, including viewing case information, reporting changes in factors that affect eligibility or benefit level, and/or uploading documents.

Nebraska allows clients to view case information, report changes and upload documents.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

21. Call Centers

Call centers can provide support to the certification process in local offices by reducing the time local certification offices spend answering phone calls concerning general SNAP information, application and benefit status information, certification interviews, customer complaints, and processing changes. In some states, call centers go beyond these functions to directly certify and re-certify households. Call centers can help reduce errors caused by unreported changes, high workloads, and unanswered phone/voice mail messages. Benefits include task specialization, prompt customer service, self-service options, measurable work performance, dedicated phone lines, and one phone number for participants to remember. Additional information on call center functionality is available in the SNAP State Agency Profiles.

In Nebraska, the Division of Children and Family Services, Economic Assistance programs tied to ACCESSNebraska has two (2) Customer Service Centers located in Fremont and Scottsbluff as well as many local offices across the state. This does not expand initial eligibility for SNAP eligibility.

Nebraska currently utilizes this option.

22. Mobile Technology

The use of mobile technology enables procedural changes that streamline the enrollment process, facilitate verification and reporting requirements, and reduce “churning.” According to a 2015 Pew Research study, low-income individuals are more likely to be “smartphone-dependent,” meaning these Americans own a cell phone, but lack access to other sources of high-speed internet at home and have limited options for going online other than their cell phone. Through the use of mobile technologies, states can provide better service and more readily reach populations that lack access to a personal computer, enhancing access for those who would otherwise be limited in their ability to access information and complete the certification process.

Nebraska is currently in the process of procuring a contractor for text messaging due to the awarding of the FNS Process and Tech Improvement Grant in 2016.

OTHER:

Required Verification

Effective October 2009, when total countable resources are below \$1,500, a client’s declaration on resources is sufficient. Client declaration on shelter and utility expenses is also accepted. Accepting client declaration is allowed per Title 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). This does not expand initial SNAP eligibility.

Report Changes (ACCESSNebraska)

Effective November 2009, a client that is currently receiving benefits and has a change to report, may report changes electronically via ACCESSNebraska. The client enters their name, birth date and the last four numbers of the Social Security number and enters their change electronically. This does not expand initial SNAP eligibility.

Modernization Initiatives

States are continually seeking innovative managerial and technology solutions to increase efficiency. Modernization initiatives include check-in kiosks statewide or in select areas, telephonic signature at application or recertification, automated voice response/interactive voice response system statewide or in select areas, process improvement projects statewide or in select areas, case banking, specialized work units, and targeted or waived interviewing and case processing. This does not expand initial SNAP eligibility.

SNAP-Ed (former Nutrition Education) Program and Outreach Initiatives

All states, except Guam, have SNAP-Ed programs. In addition, some states have formal Outreach Programs to increase program participation. A number of additional states conduct informal Outreach activities.

The DHHS contracts with the University of NE to deliver SNAP-Ed. One component of the contract is to conduct informal outreach activities.

The DHHS contracts with the Food Bank for the Heartland and a number of other community advocacy agencies in a formal Outreach Plan.

The DHHS has also developed a process of establishing community partnerships with community agencies and advocates increasing outreach primarily through assisting community partners with outreach and application assistance to SNAP applicants.

The DHHS presents information at area events, through Public Service Announcements on the radio and television for ACCESSNebraska web services as well as with brochures and flyers available at local offices and through community partners. This does not expand initial SNAP eligibility.