

# MANUAL TRANSMITTAL

## Arkansas Department of Human Services

### Division of County Operations

Policy     Form     Policy Directive

**Issuance Number** FSC 02-05

Food Stamp Certification **Manual**

**Issuance Date** 04-01-2002

**From:** Joni Jones  
Director

**Expiration Date** Until  
Superseded

**Subj:** Revised Procedures for Scheduling Out-of-Office Interviews  
Handling Unclear Information

**Implementation Date:** By federal mandate this policy will be implemented April 1, 2002.  
Approval of the policy under the Administrative Procedures Act will not occur until April 10, 2002.

**Pages to be deleted`**

**Pages to be added**

Front 4410 to 4420  
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Front 8200 to 8220  
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Front None  
Back None

12400 to 12410  
12420 to 12430

See the back of this page for the Summary of Changes.

**Summary of Changes**

Go to the corresponding number in the body of the policy to see the revised policy.

1. FSC 4420 – Item 3 has been separated into two separate items. The new number 3 now provides information only about the exclusion of life insurance policies as a resource. The new number 4 now provides information only about the exclusion of burial policies as a resource. All subsequent items have been renumbered.
2. FSC 8230 – A statement has been added to clarify that households must only supply an application containing a name, an address and a signature in order for the county office to schedule an interview.
3. FSC 8250 – The conditions under which an out-of-office must be scheduled have been revised. Having an AR will no longer be a factor in determining whether to grant an out-of-office interview. Out-of-office interviews will be scheduled upon request for any household where all members are aged and/or disabled and there is no earned income. Also, there are changes in the procedures for granting out-of-office interviews to other households under the hardship provisions.
4. FSC 10510 – A statement has been added to clarify that when it is time for a household to appear for an interview at recertification, the county offices must schedule this interviews to accommodate the needs of households with special circumstances.
5. FSC 12400 – There are new procedures for handling reported changes when the worker cannot determine the effect of the reported change on the household's eligibility and/or benefit level. Workers must send a request for contact to the household before issuing any advance notice of adverse action.
6. FSC 12410 – The language about changes reported to E&T workers has been removed from the policy. The Food Stamp E&T Program is no longer operated in the DHS county office.

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**Home and Lot/Household and Personal Goods/Life Insurance/Pension Funds**

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The residence and surrounding property remain excluded when temporarily unoccupied for the following reasons:

- Employment
- Training for future employment
- Illness of a household member
- Inhabitability caused by casualty or natural disaster, if the household plans to return to the residence

A household that does not currently own a home receives an exclusion if: a) the household owns or is purchasing a lot on which they intend to build or are building a home, and b) they plan to reside in the home. The exclusion applies to the value of the lot and home if partially completed. There is no limit to the partial completion of the home. There is no limit to the size of the lot if the lot is not separated by intervening property owned by others, nor are there any limits to the period of time in the future when the household plans to build the home.

Verification of the value of the home and lot must be obtained if the information given by the household about the home and lot affects eligibility and is questionable. All circumstances surrounding this decision must be documented.

**4420      Household and Personal Goods/Life Insurance/Pension Funds      01-01-99**

The following items will be excluded when determining countable resources:

1. Household goods such as, but not limited to, appliances, microwaves, lawn mowers, garden tractors, furniture and TV satellite dishes.
2. Personal effects such as, but not limited to, tools, jewelry and clothing.

3. The cash value of life insurance policies.

4. Prepaid burial policies and plans to the extent the funds in such a plan are inaccessible.

**NOTE:** Any amount that can be withdrawn (less a \$1,500 per person disregard) from prepaid burial plans without a contractual obligation to repay will be counted as a resource for food stamp purposes. See FSC 4602.

5. Livestock.

6. The cash value of pension plans. Under a salary reduction retirement plan, employees have their employer withhold payment of a specified portion of current salary for investment in a retirement savings plan. The employer often contributes to the plan as well. The plans that may be excluded as a resource and are authorized by Federal law are:

**Household and Personal Goods/Property Related to use of Excluded Vehicles**

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- 401(k) Plans including cash or deferred payment arrangements;
- The Federal Employees' Retirement Thrift Savings Plan;
- 403(b) Plans and other tax-sheltered annuities;
- 501(c) (18) Plans which are trusts created before June 1959;
- 457 Plans for state, local governments, other tax-exempt organizations; and
- Simplified Employer Pension (SEP) plans that are IRA plans completely funded by the employer.

Note: Individual Retirement Accounts and Keogh Plans are counted as resources. See FSC 4630 - 4640.

**4430 Property Related To the Use of Excluded Vehicles****07-01-01**

Real or personal property that is directly related to the maintenance or use of a vehicle will be excluded as a resource if that vehicle is excluded as a resource because it is:

1. Annually producing income consistent with its fair market value; or
2. Used primarily (over 50 percent of the time that the vehicle is used) for income producing purposes such as, but not limited to taxis, trucks, or fishing boats; or
1. Used to transport a physically disabled household member.

Only that portion of real property actually involved in the maintenance or use of an excludable vehicle is to be excluded under these provisions.

Example 1 A household owns a one-acre field but only uses 1/4 of that acre to park and maintain equipment for a self-employment enterprise. Only the 1/4-acre actually in use will be excluded. If the one-acre tract is worth \$1,000, 1/4 of the value is \$250. \$250 would be excluded as a resource. \$750 would be counted as a resource.

This method of determining the amount of resource exclusion is not affected by state or local zoning laws or by the household's ability to convert the property to a cash resource.

Example 2 The household in example 1 above declares that the one-acre tract they own is in an incorporated industrial area. They state that local laws prevent them from selling anything less than the full one-acre tract. In spite of this, only the \$250 amount for the 1/4-acre actually used will be excluded as a resource. \$750 will be counted as a resource.

**FSC – INITIAL APPLICATIONS**

**8200 to 8220**

**The Application Interview/Same Day Interviews/Interviews Scheduled at a Later Date**

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**8200    The Application Interview**

**2-01-99**

A qualified certification worker (county office worker) must conduct an interview with each food stamp applicant. The applicant may be the case head (FSC 1500), his or her spouse, another responsible household member, or the household's authorized representative (FSC 900).

The applicant may bring anyone to the interview. If the applicant (or any accompanying person) becomes physically or verbally abusive to the worker during the interview process, the worker may terminate the interview and reschedule another time for completion of the interview process. When applicants are under the influence of intoxicants or are mentally impaired to the extent that an interview cannot be conducted, the worker may request the interview be held with another household member or an authorized representative.

Any time the worker finds it necessary to terminate an interview and/or request that someone else complete the interview, all circumstances surrounding the incident will be fully documented in the case record and reported to supervisory personnel in the county office.

**8210    Same Day Interviews**

**2-01-99**

Same day interviews are those interviews conducted with the household the same day the application is filed. Same day interviews relieve the county office of routinely assigning an appointment time for the interviews. The county office worker must document the date of the interview on the application form.

**8220    Interviews Scheduled at a Later Date**

**2-01-99**

When it is not possible for a county office worker to complete an interview with an applicant on the same day the application is submitted, the DHS county office must schedule an interview for the applicant. It is not acceptable to schedule interviews on a first-come, first-serve basis where once the number of applicants in line reaches a quota, the local office will accept no more individuals for an interview. Each applicant must be assigned a date and time to return for the interview.

No system of assigning appointments is mandated; however, each county office must have a system in which appointments are assigned in a specific manner without favoritism toward any applicant or group of applicants. The county may assign each household a specific date and time or may assign appointments in blocks of time so long as each applicant is advised of the date and time on which he or she must return for an interview.

See FSC 9420 for special instructions on scheduling interviews for expedited households.

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**8230 Scheduling Interviews**

**04-01-02**

**NOTE:** Each county office must have a plan for scheduling out-of-the office interviews. See FSC 8250.

Counties may select one of two options for assigning interview times to food stamp benefit applicants.

Option 1: The county office may assign an interview time to anyone upon that person's request. The assignment of an appointment prior to the submission of a food stamp application form must not affect a household's entitlement to expedited service.

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Option 2: The county office may assign an interview time only to households that have submitted an application for food stamp benefits containing at least a name, address and signature.

No matter which option is chosen county offices must insure the policy is applied fairly and consistently to all food stamp applicants. To the extent practicable, the DHS county office must schedule interviews to accommodate the needs of groups with special needs, including households with members who work.

An interview must be scheduled upon receipt of an application form. All interviews must be scheduled as quickly as possible. Eligible households must be given an opportunity to participate in the Food Stamp Program within 30 days; therefore, interviews should be scheduled no later than 20 days from the date of application. When this is not possible, the interview should be scheduled at the first available appointment time. If a household fails to appear for a scheduled interview, no additional interviews will be scheduled unless requested by the household.

The DHS county office may not deny a household's interview prior to the 30<sup>th</sup> day after the date of application if the household fails to appear for the first scheduled interview. If the household requests a second interview during the 30-day application processing period and is determined eligible, the household's benefits must be prorated from the date of application. See FSC 8520 for additional information.

**8240 Conducting Interviews**

**12-01-00**

At a minimum, an interview of an applicant must cover the topics and complete the actions listed below:

1. The applicants must be advised of his or her right to a confidential interview.

2. The applicants must be advised of her or her rights and responsibilities.

*This includes their rights under the Privacy Act that restrict the release of information in the case record to the conditions specified in FSC 530, their right to review the contents of their case record (FSC 540), their right to an administrative hearing (FSC 16300), and their responsibility to cooperate during the interview and certification process. A copy of the pamphlet, *Your Rights and Your Responsibilities*, PUB 279 will be given to the household.*

3. The applicant must be advised that all food stamp cases are subject to review by the Quality Assurance Unit and that failure to cooperate with the Quality Assurance Unit will result in case closure.
4. The applicant must be advised that social security numbers (SSN's) must be declared and verified for all household members.

*The use of the SSN will also be explained. (See FSC 2000.)*

5. The worker must assist the applicant in completing the application form, if necessary.
6. The worker must review the information on the application with the applicant and resolve any unclear or inconsistent information.
7. The worker must request needed verification and tell the applicant how to return this information to the county office.

*The worker will assist the household in obtaining the needed verification when the worker becomes aware that assistance is needed. A business reply mail (BRM) envelope will be provided to the applicant to return the verification or the applicant may return the information in person.*

8. The worker will advise the applicant of the time frames under which his or her application will be processed.
9. The worker will advise the applicant of the consequences of a voluntary quit as explained in FSC 3413.
10. The worker will issue to any applicant not subject to quarterly reporting a *Change Report Form* (DCO-234) and will advise the applicant to use the form to report changes as explained in FSC 11200.
11. The worker will advise the applicant that the Cooperative Extension Service provides nutrition education, free of charge, in each county.

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**8250 Interviews Held Out of the Office**

**04-01-02**

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Normally, a face to face interview with the applicant is conducted in the county office. However, the office interview will be waived upon request for any household where all the members are aged or disabled and there is no earned income. Out of office interviews will be granted on a case-by-case basis under a hardship provision. Hardship provisions include situations such as but not limited to:

- Transportation difficulties
- Illness
- Hardships due to residency in a rural area
- Situations where the applicant is required to remain in the home to care for an ill or disabled household member
- Prolonged severe weather
- Work hours or training hours that preclude an office interview - e.g., the only member available to come in for the interview works from 8:00 to 4:30 and cannot leave the job

The household may choose to appoint an authorized representative to appear at the interview.

The case record will be documented to reflect why the household requested an out of office interview and why the request was either approved or denied.

The county office has the option of conducting an out-of-office interview either by telephone or through a home visit. (A face-to-face interview must be granted to any household that requests one.) If a home visit is selected, the date and time of the visit must be scheduled in advance with the household.

All normal verification requirements apply to households that have an out-of-office interview. However, special procedures such as the use of collateral contacts may be necessary in order for the household to comply with verification requirements within the 30-day processing period.

The use of a telephone interview or an interview by home visit will not affect the length of the certification period assigned to the household. See FSC 8710 for information about assigning certification periods.

**Preparation of Notice of Expiration and Timely Applications**

- A statement of the household's right to request an application and have the application accepted as long as it is signed and contains a legible name and address.
- An explanation of the consequences of failure to comply with the notice of expiration.
- An explanation of the household's right to request a fair hearing.
- An explanation that any household consisting only of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants or recipients may apply for recertification at a Social Security Office. See FSC 8920.

DCO-239's are run on the night of the third workday of household's next-to-last month of certification. When the DCO-239's are received in the county office, the following information will be added.

- The time and date of the household's interview if one is scheduled via the DCO-239. (See FSC 10510.)
- The date by which the household must reapply.

DCO-239's will be manually prepared and issued to the household when

- The household is certified for one month or for two months in the second month of the application period; or
- When the household is certified for two or three months and the date of certifications occurs too late for a DCO-239 to be automatically generated for the household.
- When a case is automatically closed because the quarterly report was not processed and then the case is reinstated during the last two months of the household's certification period.

Manually prepared DCO-239s must contain the same information as computer generated DCO-239s. The county office must include an application form with all DCO-239's issued.

**Issuance of the Notice of Expiration**

<b>Length of Certification Period</b>	<b>When Notice Should Be Issued</b>
One Month	At Time of Certification
Two Month	At Time of Certification
Longer Than Two Month	During the Next-to-Last Month of Certification Period.

**10300 Timely Submission of an Application for Recertification**

**04-01-94**

For households certified for one month or for two months, in the last month of the application period an application must be filed within 15 days of the date the DCO-239 is issued, to be considered timely. See FSC 10210 for instructions.

**FSC – RECERTIFICATION**  
**Timely Applications for Recertification and Interviews**

**10300 to 10510**

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For all other households, an application for recertification submitted by the 15th day of the last month of certification is timely filed.

*Timely Reapplication*

<b>Length of Certification Period</b>	<b>Last Day to Timely Reapply</b>
One Month	15 Days After DCO-239 Was Issued
Two Month	15 Days After DCO-239 Was Issued
Longer Than Two Months	The 15 <sup>th</sup> Day of the Last Month in the Certification Period.

**10310 Uninterrupted Benefits**

**10-01-97**

*An eligible household that submits a timely application for recertification is entitled to uninterrupted benefits. Timely filed applications must be approved or denied by the end of the household's current certification period. If a timely application is approved, the food stamp benefit for the first month of the new certification period must be received at the normal time.*

**10400 Untimely Submission of an Application for Recertification**

**06-01-01**

Applications received after the household's deadline to timely file but within 30 days of the last day of the month in which the household's certification period expired are classified as untimely applications. A household submitting an untimely application for recertification loses its right to uninterrupted benefits.

Food stamp benefits for the first month of the certification period will not be prorated if the household applies before the end of its current certification period and does not cause any delays in the processing of the application. Benefits will be prorated for eligible households that reapply after their certification period expires even though the application is classified as a recertification.

**10500 The Recertification Interview**

**10-01-97**

Households that submit a timely application for recertification must be interviewed before the end of their current certification period.

**10510 Scheduling Recertification Interviews**

**06-01-01**

No method of scheduling recertification interviews is mandated. However, each household whose certification period is expiring must be assigned a date and time for an interview. These interviews may be held prior to or during the last month of certification. Any system of assigning interviews must be impartial and flexible enough to allow interviews to be rescheduled, upon request, without unduly delaying the recertification process. **To the extent possible, the DHS county office must schedule the interview to accommodate the needs of households with special circumstances, including working households.**

**12400 Unclear Information**

**04-01-02**

During a household’s certification period, a county office worker may become aware of changes in a household’s circumstances and yet not be able to determine the effect of the changes on the household’s eligibility and/or food stamp benefit amount. Such unclear information may come from a third party or from the household itself. (NOTE: See FSC 12440 for instructions on handling changes reported by field investigators.)

The worker must attempt to clarify and, if necessary, verify the household’s current circumstances using the following procedure:

1. Using a *Notice of Action* (DCO-1), manually issue a request for contact. The manually issued DCO-1 must clearly advise the household of the information that must be provided or the actions that the household must take to clarify its situation and that failure to respond to the *Notice of Action* may result in case closure.
2. Allow the household at least 10 days to respond to the manually issued request for contact and clarify its situation. (*The household may contact the worker by telephone or in person or by letter to explain its current situation. Or, the household may be directed to provide written documentation to verify the questionable information.*)

Once a household has contacted the DHS county office in response to a request for contact, the household must refuse to cooperate with the requests to clarify its situation before the case can be closed. (*Exception: If the household has become ineligible, the case will be closed.*) If the household responds to the manually issued *request for contact* but cannot provide the needed verification, the worker must assist the household in obtaining the needed information. See the *Glossary*, definition of “Verification.”

The following chart explains the actions to be taken after the RFC has been issued to the household.

NOTE: When a manual notice is issued, the worker must key an “N” in field 83 of WFSM in counties where FACTS is operating. In counties where ANSWER is operating, the worker must delete the notice indicator before the case is sent for interface.

<b>HOUSEHOLD’S RESPONSE TO RFC</b>	<b>COUNTY OFFICE RESPONSE</b>
The household responded to the RFC. The information provided by the household resulted in closure of the food stamp case.	Send the household a 10-day advance notice of adverse action to explain that the food stamp case will be closed because the household is currently ineligible to receive food stamp benefits. The notice must explain the reason for the ineligibility. For example, if the household’s income exceeds the income limits, the notice must explain this to the household.

**FSC - PROCESSING REPORTED CHANGES**  
**Unclear Information**

**12410 - 12410**

<b>HOUSEHOLD'S RESPONSE TO RFC</b>	<b>COUNTY OFFICE RESPONSE</b>
The household responded to the RFC. The information provided by the household resulted in a decrease in the food stamp benefit amount.	Send the household a 10-day advance notice of adverse action stating that the household's food stamp benefit amount must be reduced. The notice must specify the effective date of the reduction and the reason for the reduction. For example, if the household's income increased, the notice must explain this to the household.
The household responded to the RFC. The information provided by the household resulted in an increase in the food stamp benefit amount	Send the household an adequate notice to explain the increase in benefits and the effective date of the increase..
The household responded to the RFC. The information provided by the household resulted in no change to the food stamp benefit amount	Send the household an adequate notice to explain that the situation has been resolved and there is no change in the benefit amount..
The household failed to respond to the RFC.	Send the household a 10-day advance notice of adverse action stating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the food stamp case will be closed because the household failed to respond to the request for contact; and</li> <li>• That the household must submit a new application to continue receiving food stamp benefits.</li> </ul>
The household failed to respond to the RFC and to the 10-day advance notice of adverse action.	Close the case.
The household responded to the RFC but refused to cooperate with the worker's requests to clarify its situation.	Send the household a 10-day advance notice of adverse action stating that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The food stamp case will be closed because the household failed to respond to the request for contact; and</li> <li>• The household must submit a new application to continue receiving food stamp benefits.</li> </ul>
The household responded to the first 10-day advance notice of adverse action and provided the needed information. Based on this information, the case must be closed.	Send the household <u>another</u> 10-day advance notice of adverse action stating that the food stamp case will be closed because the household is currently ineligible to receive food stamp benefits and the reason for the ineligibility. For example, if the household's income exceeds the income limits, the notice must explain this to the household.

**FSC - PROCESSING REPORTED CHANGES**  
**Unclear Information / Changes Reported by Other DCO Personnel**

**12410 - 12410**

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<b>HOUSEHOLD'S RESPONSE TO RFC</b>	<b>COUNTY OFFICE RESPONSE</b>
The household responded to the first 10-day advance notice of adverse action and provided the needed information. Based on this information, the household's benefits must be reduced.	Send the household another 10-day advance notice of adverse action stating that the household's food stamp benefits will be reduced. The notice must specify the effective date of the reduction and the reason for the reduction. For example, if the household's income increased, the notice must explain this to the household

.FSC 12410 through FSC 12460 contains instructions for processing changes reported to the food stamp worker by someone other than a household member.

**12410 Changes Reported by Other DCO Personnel**

**04-01-02**

Changes reported to Medicaid workers that become known to the food stamp worker will be processed within 10 days of the date the change became known.

This applies to both occasional reporting and quarterly reporting households. If the change reported to the Medicaid worker is a change in medical expenses, the food stamp worker may not contact the household for additional verification of medical expenses.

When a member of a food stamp household enters a nursing home, this member is to be removed from the food stamp household. If this person was the only household member, the food stamp case will be closed.

When a husband and wife have been receiving social security and/or SSI and only one of them enters a nursing home, there may be several adjustments in the couple's SSI and/or social security checks. The food stamp case should be monitored closely for several months to determine the effect of these changes. If the effect of the changes cannot be determined, the worker will use the procedures in FSC 12400 to clarify the household's situation.