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Subpart A—General Rules

§ 273.1 Household concept.

(a) *General household definition.* A household is composed of one of the following individuals or groups of individuals, unless otherwise specified in paragraph (b) of this section:

- (1) An individual living alone;
- (2) An individual living with others, but customarily purchasing food and preparing meals for home consumption separate and apart from others; or
- (3) A group of individuals who live together and customarily purchase food and prepare meals together for home consumption.

(b) *Special household requirements—(1) Required household combinations.* The following individuals who live with others must be considered as customarily purchasing food and preparing meals with the others, even if they do not do so, and thus must be included in the same household, unless otherwise specified.

(i) Spouses;
 (ii) A person under 22 years of age who is living with his or her natural or adoptive parent(s) or step-parent(s); and

(iii) A child (other than a foster child) under 18 years of age who lives with and is under the parental control of a household member other than his or her parent. A child must be considered to be under parental control for purposes of this provision if he or she is financially or otherwise dependent on a member of the household, unless State law defines such a person as an adult.

(2) *Elderly and disabled persons.* Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (a) of this section, an otherwise eligible member of a household who is 60 years of age or older and is unable to purchase and prepare meals because he or she suffers from a disability considered permanent under the Social Security Act or a non disease-related, severe, permanent disability may be considered, together with his or her spouse (if living there), a separate household from the others with whom the individual lives. Separate household status under this provision must not be granted when the income of the others with whom the elderly disabled individual resides (excluding the income of the elderly and disabled individual and his or her spouse) exceeds 165 percent of the poverty line.

(3) *Boarders.* (i) Residents of a commercial boarding house, regardless of the number of residents, are not eligible to participate in the Program. A commercial boarding house is an establishment licensed to offer meals and lodging for compensation. It does not include any of the entities listed in paragraph (b)(7)(vii) of this section. In project areas without licensing requirements, a commercial boarding house is a commercial establishment that offers meals and lodging for compensation with the intent of making a profit.

(ii) All other individuals or groups of individuals paying a reasonable amount for meals or meals and lodging must be considered boarders and are not eligible to participate in the Program independently of the household providing the board. Such individuals or groups of individuals may participate, along with a spouse or children

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living with them, as members of the household providing the boarder services, only at the request of the household providing the boarder services. An individual paying less than a reasonable amount for board must not be considered a boarder but must be considered, along with a spouse or children living with him or her, as a member of the household providing the board.

(A) For individuals whose board arrangement is for more than two meals per day, “reasonable compensation” must be an amount that equals or exceeds the maximum food stamp allotment for the appropriate size of the boarder household.

(B) For individuals whose board arrangement is for two meals or less per day, “reasonable compensation” must be an amount that equals or exceeds two-thirds of the maximum food stamp allotment for the appropriate size of the boarder household.

(iii) Boarders must not be considered to be residents of an institution as outlined in paragraph (b)(7)(vii) of this section.

(4) *Foster care individuals.* Individuals placed in the home of relatives or other individuals or families by a Federal, State, or local governmental foster care program must be considered to be boarders. They cannot participate in the Program independently of the household providing the foster care services. Such foster care individuals may participate, along with a spouse or children living with them, as members of the household providing the foster care services, only at the request of the household providing the foster care.

(5) *Roomers.* Individuals to whom a household furnishes lodging for compensation, but not meals, may participate as separate households. Persons described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section must not be considered roomers.

(6) *Live-in attendants.* A live-in attendant may participate as a separate household. Persons described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section must not be considered live-in attendants.

(7) *Ineligible household members.* The following persons are not eligible to participate as separate households or as a member of any household:

(i) Ineligible aliens and students as specified in §§ 273.4 and 273.5, respectively;

(ii) SSI recipients in “cash-out” States as specified in § 273.20;

(iii) Individuals disqualified for non-compliance with the work requirements of § 273.7;

(iv) Individuals disqualified for failure to provide an SSN as specified in § 273.6;

(v) Individuals disqualified for an intentional Program violation as specified in § 273.16; and

(vi) Residents of an institution, with some exceptions. Individuals must be considered residents of an institution when the institution provides them with the majority of their meals (over 50 percent of three meals daily) as part of the institution’s normal services. Exceptions to this requirement include only the individuals listed in paragraphs (b)(7)(vii)(A) through (b)(7)(vii)(E) of this section. The individuals listed in paragraphs (b)(7)(vii)(A) through (b)(7)(vii)(E) can participate in the Program and must be treated as separate households from the others with whom they reside, subject to the mandatory household combination requirements of paragraph (b)(1) of this section, unless otherwise stated:

(A) Individuals who are residents of federally subsidized housing for the elderly;

(B) Individuals who are narcotic addicts or alcoholics and reside at a facility or treatment center for the purpose of regular participation in a drug or alcohol treatment and rehabilitation program. This includes the children but not the spouses of such persons who live with them at the treatment center or facility;

(C) Individuals who are disabled or blind and are residents of group living arrangements;

(D) Individual women or women with their children who are temporarily residing in a shelter for battered women and children; and

(E) Individuals who are residents of public or private nonprofit shelters for homeless persons.

(vii) Individuals who are ineligible under § 273.11(m) because of a drug-related felony conviction.

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(viii) At State agency option, individuals who are disqualified in another assistance program in accordance with § 273.11(k).

(ix) Individuals who are fleeing to avoid prosecution or custody for a crime, or an attempt to commit a crime, or who are violating a condition of probation or parole who are ineligible under § 273.11(n).

(x) Individuals disqualified for failure to cooperate with child support enforcement agencies in accordance with § 273.11(o) or (p), or for being delinquent in any court-ordered child support obligation in accordance with § 273.11(q).

(xi) Persons ineligible under § 273.24, the time limit for able-bodied adults.

(c) *Unregulated situations.* For situations that are not clearly addressed by the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section, the State agency may apply its own policy for determining when an individual is a separate household or a member of another household if the policy is applied fairly, equitably and consistently throughout the State.

(d) *Head of household.* (1) A State agency shall not use the head of household designation to impose special requirements on the household, such as requiring that the head of household, rather than another responsible member of the household, appear at the certification office to make application for benefits. When designating the head of household, the State agency shall allow the household to select an adult parent of children (of any age) living in the household, or an adult who has parental control over children (under 18 years of age) living in the household, as the head of household provided that all adult household members agree to the selection. The State agency shall permit such households to select their head at each certification action or whenever there is a change in household composition. The State agency shall provide written notice to all households at the time of application and as otherwise appropriate that specifies the household's right to select its head of household in accordance with this paragraph. The written notice shall identify which households have the option to select their head of household, the circumstances under which a household may change its des-

ignation of head of household, and how such changes must be reported to the State agency. If all adult household members do not agree to the selection or decline to select an adult parent as the head of household, the State agency may designate the head of household or permit the household to make another selection. In no event shall the household's failure to select an adult parent of children or an adult who has parental control over children as the head of household delay the certification or result in the denial of benefits of an otherwise eligible household. For households that do not consist of adult parents and children or adults who have parental control of children living in the household, the State agency shall designate the head of household or permit the household to do so.

(2) For purposes of failure to comply with the work requirements of § 273.7, the head of household shall be the principal wage earner unless the household has selected an adult parent of children as specified in paragraph (d)(1) of this section. The principal wage earner shall be the household member (including excluded members) who is the greatest source of earned income in the two months prior to the month of the violation. This provision applies only if the employment involves 20 hours or more per week or provides weekly earnings at least equivalent to the Federal minimum wage multiplied by 20 hours. No person of any age living with a parent or person fulfilling the role of a parent who is registered for work or exempt from work registration requirements because such parent or person fulfilling the role of a parent is subject to and participating in any work requirement under title IV of the Social Security Act, or in receipt of unemployment compensation (or has registered for work as part of the application for or receipt of unemployment compensation), or is employed or self-employed and working a minimum of 30 hours weekly or receiving weekly earnings equal to the Federal minimum wage multiplied by 30 hours shall be considered the head of household unless the person is an adult parent of children as specified in § 273.1(d)(1) and the household elects to designate the adult parent as its head

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of household. If there is no principal source of earned income in the household, the household member, documented in the casefile as the head of the household at the time of the violation, shall be considered the head of household. The designation of head of household through the circumstances of this paragraph shall take precedence over a previous designation of head of household at least until the period of ineligibility is ended.

(e) *Strikers.* Households with a striking member are not eligible to participate in the Program, unless the household was eligible for benefits the day before the strike and is otherwise eligible at the time of application. A striker must be anyone involved in a strike or concerted stoppage of work by employees (including a stoppage by reason of the expiration of a collective-bargaining agreement) and any concerted slowdown or other concerted interruption of operations by employees. Any employee affected by a lockout, however, must not be deemed to be a striker. Further, an individual who goes on strike but is exempt from work registration under § 273.7(b) the day before the strike, other than those exempt solely on the grounds that they are employed, must not be deemed to be a striker. Also, persons such as truck drivers who cannot do their jobs because the strike has left them with nothing to deliver, and employees who are not part of the bargaining unit and do not want to cross the picket line for fear of personal injury or death, must not be deemed to be strikers.

(1) Pre-strike eligibility must be determined by considering the day prior to the strike as the day of application and assuming the strike did not occur.

(2) Eligibility at the time of application must be determined by comparing the striking member's income before the strike to the striker's current income and adding the higher of the two to the current income of non-striking members during the month of application. If the household is eligible, the higher income figure must also be used in determining the household's benefits.

[Amdt. 132, 43 FR 47889, Oct. 17, 1978]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting § 273.1, see the List of CFR

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Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and at www.fdsys.gov.

§ 273.2 Office operations and application processing.

(a) *Operation of food stamp offices and processing of applications—(1) Office operations.* State agencies must establish procedures governing the operation of food stamp offices that the State agency determines best serve households in the State, including households with special needs, such as, but not limited to, households with elderly or disabled members, households in rural areas with low-income members, homeless individuals, households residing on reservations, households with adult members who are not proficient in English, and households with earned income (working households). The State agency must provide timely, accurate, and fair service to applicants for, and participants in, the Food Stamp Program. The State agency cannot, as a condition of eligibility, impose additional application or application processing requirements. The State agency must have a procedure for informing persons who wish to apply for food stamps about the application process and their rights and responsibilities. The State agency must base food stamp eligibility solely on the criteria contained in the Act and this part.

(2) *Application processing.* The application process includes filing and completing an application form, being interviewed, and having certain information verified. The State agency must act promptly on all applications and provide food stamp benefits retroactive to the month of application to those households that have completed the application process and have been determined eligible. The State agency must make expedited service available to households in immediate need. Specific responsibilities of households and State agencies in the application process are detailed below.

(b) *Food Stamp application form—(1) Content.* Each application form shall contain:

(i) In prominent and boldface lettering and understandable terms a statement that the information provided by the applicant in connection with the application for food stamp